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# The Masthead

The other Sunday, I shamefully found myself sucked in by the usual mixture of tiredness, idle curiosity and low-level cathode addiction to the tail end of one of those soullessly egregious Top 100 Best programmes, TV's equivalent of a saturated fatty snack attack – this time, it was Best Pop Video. It's always nice to be reacquainted with the work of Chris Cunningham and Michel Gondry but inevitably it was a reminder that the rise of video has occurred in inverse proportion to the lowering and glazing over of mainstream pop and rock. The visual language foisted on pop has bled into that of advertising, asserting a limited, single interpretation of the music rather than an unlimited interpretive one.

Video says the budget of fledgling groups, a massive and compulsory commitment now that the imperative is to be seen in the marketplace rather than sought out on the margins. Pop video, like so much of the multitracked but impoverished music it accompanies, too often clogs rather than inflames the senses, with its over-niche, forced diet of fast-cut fantasy, over-emoting, graphics for graphics' sake. Very depressing.

It's tempting to try to push the toothpaste back into the tube, call for some sort of ban on visual accompaniment in order to restore the primacy of

listening – though as one who, in spite of himself, is a little addicted to the sugar rush of video, I shudder at 70s memories of Old Grey Whistle Test, when lengthy tracks by artists absent from the studio ran in sync with reels of deliberately inappropriate old black and white stock footage, which always struck me as an oblique gesture of condescension on Prog culture's part. Watching old Cabaret Voltaire and Kraftwerk videos on DVD, you're reminded that for all their honourable aesthetic intentions, they didn't quite have the technical nous to realise their ideas visually.

Today, there is a thriving VJ culture that has grown in the wake of electronica and glitch. Largely, however, the abstract graphics they generate signify nothing other than a need to provide any distraction, from the dull spectacle of some sallow sound engineer semivisible from behind the back of a Mac laptop.

There are, however, numerous successful alternative strategies from past and present. BerlinSuper80, reviewed by Biba Kopf in Cross Platform, features a welter of Super-8 movies shot, often on the hoof and demonstrating flickering, exciting video art sensibility and resourcefulness that typifies that brief period of artistic fertility in post-punk Germany. In more recent

times, Düsseldorf's Rechenzentrum (Marc Weiser and Ulfvén) had sought to establish a relationship between audio and visual culture, attempting (necessarily unsuccessfully) to capture the "unseeable" in sound. This, ironically, they did primarily by not attempting to pander to each other's work. As film maker Ulfvén put it in *The Wire* 236, "I have no interest in providing a visual tapestry for the music, and Marc is not interested in providing the soundtrack for 'my film'."

And then there's Towering Inferno, whose Richard Wolfson sadly died on 1 February, as reported in BitStream. Their audiovisual work Kaddish (1993) took as its theme the Holocaust. Musically, it was a non-linear patchwork of styles and juxtapositions; visually, too, it eschewed the often/pompographic use of shocking images. Instead, it cried the subject matter, set together distantly poignant and highly suggestive images of the sacred and the Nazi profane. Its non-storyboard implied that there was not a beginning, middle and end to the Nazi era, but that both the fragments of its legacy and the elements of its making are all around us. Channel 4 viewers preferred Robbie Williams in his underpants on "Rock DJ".

DAVID STUBBS

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# Letters

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Spot the difference: Death Metalheadz Morbid Angel (left) and Black Metalheadz Mayhem

## Metal matters

Over the past five years or so it has been a pleasure to witness the cross-pollination of Metal and experimental music being increasingly documented by magazines such as *The Wire* and *Terraviva*, a trend arguably culminating in the Subterranean Metal Primer in *The Wire* 252. Edwin Pouncey was spot on about Subterranean Metal being one of the most creative and musically interesting artforms around, thus a great idea for a piece. However, I felt that it tried to be too all-encompassing and was ultimately flawed.

There seems to be an overbearing need to over-intellectualise Metal in your publication. It's just Heavy Metal! But if you are going to go as far as to reference La Monte Young, then where was Glenn Branca, whose massed guitar orchestras surely pre-empt the likes of Sunn O)))? Tailoring the piece for the average *Wire* reader oversimplified the intro. Shame really as there is a great series of articles waiting to be expanded on (on Grindcore, Black Metal, Death Metal, etc.). I wasn't feeling a personal affinity with the subject matter, something which is normally obvious from *Wire* scribes and infuses the prose with vitality and interest. It smacked somewhat of a writer-researcher make-do. It just needed that extra touch an old Metalhead could have given it.

Also, there were some rather obvious mistakes. One was the Birmingham born-and-bred Napalm Death apparently hailing from Ipswich. (Print a retraction now as I wouldn't wish an enraged Shane Embury on my

worst enemy!) I always thought Zeni Geva were a band as opposed to a "metallic guitarist". (And while I'm off on one, Moss Reeves referred to Isis in issue 251's Dilek article as 'Grindcore'???)

There were also some glaring omissions. While I realise you can only devote so many words/pages to a given topic, to omit the likes of Godflesh is unforgivable. And only a fleeting reference to The Melvins?! What's THAT all about?

While it was great to read of the excellent Khanate, more should have been made of James Plotkin's contribution to the more abstract peripheries of heavy/extreme guitar music. With outfits such as Lotus Eaters, Atom/Phantomasmasher, Triffid Project, Flux, Old, Namanax, Solarus, House Of Low Culture, Joy Of Disease, a sublime canon of solo and collaborative work, plus remix and production duties, the guy is the Jim D'Onofrio of Metal Or is that Mike Patton?

What about Earth's Phase 3: Thrones & Dominions? It's a better album than the featured Pentastar, and houses some of their most experimental work, including the title track's gorgeous trip-sque dronescapes and 'Agri Detonating Over The Bar Desert...'s blizzard of blown-speaker psychedelia.

As good as Merzbow's remixes on Sunn O)))'s *Right Of The Behemoth* are, special mention should be given to his extraordinary retextualisation of Discordance Axis's Grindcore touchstone, *The Inextinguishable Dreamless*. It is arguably the crowning glory of Akita's exemplary work with Metal/hardcore bands such as

Burst, Shora and Asterisk\*.

Another more minor gripe was that there was too much use of the term Stoner rock. Fair enough, it is hard to describe Sleep and Electric Wizard without using any other phrase, but Stoner really is a dead-end term, like the Godflesh Desert rock, conjuring up inappropriate images of mid-90s staples Kyuss and Fu Manchu. More effective would have been Doom Metal, which is an off-used and accepted turn of phrase amid us Metalheads. Better still is a term coined by Pouncey in the review of Marzaraan's *Solid State* in issue 248: Crawl Metal. Oh yes!

Jamie Stephenson Wakefield, UK

Great article about Subterranean Metal – cheers, nice to see it getting some coverage. Broke my heart though to see you missed a couple of great albums that *Wire* readers would appreciate, I reckon: Cynic's *Focus* (Roadrunner 1993) and Brutal Truth's *Need To Control* (Earache 1993) – Grindcore with didgendoos and Boredoms covers.

Also, Anne Hills Neset asked for help spotting the difference between Death and Black Metal (Go To, same issue). Well I see it is Death was all about technique and virtuosity and no image – played by guys in T-shirts and track suit bottoms with professional production. Black is different – all about image, hence make-up, etc., and played originally by people who considered production and musical proficiency secondary to feeling; in fact, sometimes its opposite, with some albums deliberately badly



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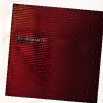
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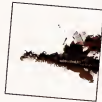
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## Letters

recorded. As with anything, it's open to argument but that's how I always saw it.  
**Craig, Finland**

Anne Hilde Naset sent an SOS for some information on the differences between Black and Death Metal, and the cavalry is on its way! Given that these genres have more or less existed since the mid-1980s it's understandable that over the past 20 years they have developed and absorbed influences from other Metal genres and beyond and from each other. If Naset lives in the UK, the issue is compounded by the fact that UK Metal bands over the years have combined elements from several genres.

Naset would have to refer to the Norwegian Black Metal scene in the early to mid-1990s and listen to early albums by Mayhem, Darkthrone, Emperor and Enslaved to appreciate the original Black Metal style: this was initially a lo-fi aesthetic with terry and brittle-sounding guitars, extremely fast drumming and fuzzy production. Technical prowess was a low priority and the music and production could be chaotic. Most of the relatively high-pitched singing was in Norwegian and the lyrics often revolved around themes familiar to Norwegians such as the weather and the landscape. There was an early interest in atmosphere and use of Ambient music elements. Fanzin of Darkthrone in particular had the short-lived Ambient music side project Neptune Towers. Many bands later incorporated synthesised orchestral elements. A good source of information is the Black Metal entry in Wikipedia ([www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com)) which gives the history of the music and also lists various BM subgenres, though these differ mainly in the choice of lyrical subject matter. Encyclopaedia Metallum ([www.metal-archives.com](http://www.metal-archives.com)) is also a good website to look at; it lists all Metal bands by country and genre and for each band entry there is a discography which may include album reviews.

I'm not so familiar with Death Metal which is a very bass-heavy style with relentless and fast rhythms and deep vocals. One of the classic bands in this genre is Morbid Angel whose singer Steve Tucker appeared in Martin Barney's *Cremaster 2* and on the Jonathan Bepler soundtrack that accompanied it. Technical skill and production have a higher value here and many bands have stuck close to traditional Metal and hard rock structures and elements, though some DM musicians have a jazz background. Again Encyclopaedia Metallum is handy for looking up DM bands.

**Jennifer Hor, Australia**

Is it really fair to credit/blame Black Sabbath for inventing the Metal genre in 1970? Iron Butterfly's "In-A-Gadda-De-Vida" and The Beatles' "Helter Skelter"

(both 1968) then Led Zeppelin's (1969) had already laid the foundations – at least in terms of heaviness, if not subject matter.

**Stephen Fall** via email

### Cathy specific

A gentle disagreement with Dan Warburton's comments on Cathy Berberian's Beatles *Anas* record (*The Boomerang*, *The Wire* 252). I remember that when the record was issued in Britain (and called *Beatles Anas* here – a later issue was called *Revolution*), every underemployed orchestra and hank singer seemed to be issuing appalling covers of Beatles songs. The Berberian record was clearly meant as a sardonic comment on this bandwagon-jumping, not as another instance of same. I doubt if anyone looking for MOR Lennon/McCartney would have bought it. Although she had a great sense of humour (listen to "Stripsody"), this isn't her best effort, admittedly – though still worth hearing.

To call her "the queen of kitsch" is a bit harsh – her other records being of Berio, Cage, Monteverdi, Debussy, etc. For a few glorious years, she not only commissioned new vocal music, but could also make avant garde music fun. I remember, too, her performances of Berio's *Epifania* and *Circles* still, after all these years. In some detail, Dan Warburton's comments make her seem like an opportunist – I don't believe that he really intended this.

**Richard Leigh** London, UK

### Bubbling under

It seems churlish of me to complain about another adventurous and eclectic Top 50 review of the year (2004 *Rawind*, *The Wire* 251). But I feel compelled to mention a few vital omissions from the list.

Tom Warts's *Real Gone* and RTX's *Transmigracion* have a grit, intensity and sheer excitement that puts most other records to shame. The former is like an American showbox of trapped pure flawed soul and creaky experimentation. The latter is a new sort of twisted Metal rock, despite the master of ceremonies being a Bush supporter on a regular diet of ELO and Red Bull (or maybe because of).

I also found it interesting that Bark Psychosis's Graham Sutton spoke of Sina Nordinstam's latest opus, *The World Is Saved*, as being one of his favourites. She remains an underrated artist, composing songs with the same subtlety and melancholy as Robert Wyatt and David Sylvian at their best. It's odd how her contemporary Björk has gained so much more attention over the years. *Medúlla* is equally unique and alien as it uneven and clumsy. It

has a similar reach of sensual exploration as previous landmarks such as Yoko Ono's *Fly* and Kate Bush's *The Dreaming*, but somehow lacks their braveness and scope of originality. Nordinstam's quiet craft seems more moving and profound in these already strange times. Anyhow, look forward to more illuminations and illustrations next year.

**Chris Jones**, London

### Preitorian avant garde

Andy Hamilton's *Global Ear* about music in Pretoria (*The Wire* 250) provided interesting reading, but contained several misperceptions about the South African music scene. From the mid-80s to mid-90s, composers followed the European avant garde fashions closely, just as earlier movements in South Africa (classicism, Romanticism, etc.) had done, including the work of some black composers. So I have to disagree with Prof Walton when he says that the music scene has moved from late Romantic to postmodern with very little in between. Indeed, the majority of South African composers are far from postmodern in their aesthetic. Modernism in all its manifestations was and still is very much the lingua franca here, and that includes Steffen Grové's exploration of indigenous African music in which the latter is very much subsumed by his structuralist writing.

Another piece of misinformation: Grové's recent exploration of indigenous African music does not "anticipate" Volans; it postdates Volans's initial research by almost a decade. And it was in fact Stanley Glasser, an exact contemporary of Grové, who was the first composer to seriously engage with African music, back in the late 1940s! Finally, while Grové is a substantial figure, he is a leader among the older generation – strongly promoted by the University at which he is Composer-in-Residence and an Emeritus – but overshadowed in many ways by a group of active younger composers.

**Michael Blake** Johannesburg, South Africa

### Corrections

Issue 252 in Soundcheck, the review of the Potlach CD Strom was by Dan Warburton, not Julian Cowley as credited. In the Incoming section of Out There, the line up for the Budapest UH festival (which was referred to in the listing as Ultrasound) was listed incorrectly: the festival's actual line up appears in the International Festivals section of this month's Out There. Issue 250 in *The Compiler*, the review of *The Noise And The City* should have been credited to Derek Walmsley, not Dan Warburton □

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# Bitstream

News and more from under the radar.

Compiled by The Trawler



Richard Wollson RIP

**Tonic**, the legendary Manhattan music venue, is in danger of being closed down. Since opening almost seven years ago, Tonic has become a nexus for both fans and practitioners of experimental and improvised music in New York City. It has played host to innumerable gigs and festivals such as John Zorn's 50th Birthday Celebration, Derek Bailey's Company Weeks, Dr Chadbourne's Guitar Festival as well as various other festivals and events that helped sustain the hyperactive downtown music scene. But recently Tonic has suffered a series of setbacks including escalating rent and insurance costs and structural problems to the venue. In order to raise the estimated \$100,000 required to save the club, a number of benefit concerts will take place over the coming weeks. For more information on how you can donate to the Tonic fighting fund, go to [www.tonicnyc.com](http://www.tonicnyc.com) >> A further cry for assistance comes from NYC jazz radio station **WKCR 89.9 FM**, launched in 1939 and more recently a bastion against the bland, deodorised mainstream jazz being pumped out by major labels and more commercial stations. For its efforts it now finds itself \$250,000 in debt and in danger of going off air altogether.

Those wishing to help out should visit [www.wkcr.org](http://www.wkcr.org) >> **The International Short Film Festival Oberhausen** takes place between 5-10 May, featuring examples of video art, animation, sound art and music clips. The festival will be presenting a screening on 6 May featuring music videos in production during 2004-05, and is looking for individual works in any musical genre to include in the screening. The address to send your entry is International Short Film Festival Oberhausen, Jessica Manstetten, Grillostr 34, 46045 Oberhausen, Germany, and the deadline is 1 March. For further details visit [www.kurzfilmtage.de](http://www.kurzfilmtage.de) >>

**Richard Wollson**, musician, film maker, writer and co-founder of the group Towering Inferno, died suddenly and unexpectedly on 1 February. Towering Inferno were best known for 1995's *Kaddish*, an audiovisual

meditation on the Holocaust which Richard and his musical partner Andy Saunders toured internationally to packed venues and some extreme responses – fan Brian Eno described *Kaddish* as “the most frightening record I have ever heard”. Richard was a popular figure in London's experimental music community – those of his friends who spoke to him in the days before his death say that he was in typically ebullient and upbeat form, and excited about the new project he and Andy Saunders were working on under the Towering Inferno banner >> April will see the release on Nones Tone of *What We Must by Norway's* Jaga (formerly Jaga Jazzist), a series of guitar led rock instrumental pieces, which has excited companions with King Crimson among those who have heard it. The 12 strong group will be on the road later in the year >> Further Norwegian tidings: on 3 March, Fabric in London will host **Fresh Air**, a festival of rock, pop jazz and electronica presented by Sunkissed Live and the Royal Norwegian Embassy to celebrate 100 years of Norwegian independence. Among the 30 acts playing will be Wibutee.

Biosphere, Xploding Plasticx and Nits Petter Molvær. [www.sunkissed.no/liveindex.html](http://www.sunkissed.no/liveindex.html) >> **Lou Reid** has announced details of his 2005 European tour, which includes just two UK appearances, at Leicester De Montfort Hall (21 April) and the Liverpool Philharmonic Hall (22): [www.loured.com](http://www.loured.com) >> **KW You Alone**, a documentary on New York's art punk scene featuring such pioneers as Suicide, Glenn Branca, Lydia Lunch and Sonic Youth alongside newcomers like Yeah Yeah Yeahs and Black Dice, opens on 8 April at London's ICA. Made by first time film maker SA Cray, it features numerous interviews with members of the groups involved, including Teenage Jesus & The Jerks, whose bassist Jim Solavunos observes, “We weren't trying to make music, we were trying to be monsters”. [www.ica.co.uk](http://www.ica.co.uk) >> Following the screening of BBC4's excellent profile of Mark E Smith, the ongoing interest in **The Fall's**

convoluted past continues with the release of *The Complete Peel Sessions 1978-2004*, a six CD box set released on 28 March on Sanctuary. The set will offer a chance to survey the group's prolific, erratic, turbulent “career” to date, as monitored by their most famous and faithful fan, the late John Peel. The set includes “Job Search”, which the group recorded for Peel's 65th birthday, and a 20 page booklet featuring rare photos and extensive session notes >> The US Erstwhile label has announced a further series of releases from a brace of ever-industrious improvisers under the banner of **Erstwhile**. The first four releases will be taken from the Amplify 2004 festival, which took place in Berlin and Cologne last year. Among the artists featured are Keith Rowe and Burkhard Belms working as a duo, Burkhard Stangl and Christof Kurzmann likewise, and a quartet featuring Christian Fennesz, Sachiko M, Otomo Yoshihide and Peter Rehberg. These discs, alongside a fourth featuring a quartet of Keith Rowe, Toshimaru Nakamura, Thomas Lehn and Marcus Schmickler, can be obtained directly from Erstwhile. [www.erstwhilerecords.com](http://www.erstwhilerecords.com) >> Named after a machine that produces static electricity, late 80s/early 70s art-Prog legends **Van Der Graaf Generator** are to regroup, 37 years after the release of their debut album, *The Aerosol Grey Machine*, a double CD of new material will be issued sometime in the first half of this year. A concert at London's Royal Festival Hall is planned for 6 May. Check [www.rfh.org.uk](http://www.rfh.org.uk) for more information >> The American Eclipse and Time Lag labels are collaborating on a new triple LP set that will bring together some of the leading lights of the US and Finnish free folk undergrounds. Titled **You Shall Know The Roots By Their Fruits**, the set will include new material by Six Organs Of Admittance, Jack Rose, Matt Valentine & Erika Elder, Dreed Focle and Fursaka, Joshua and Kemalistest Ystävät, and should be out by the time you read this. [www.eclipse-records.com](http://www.eclipse-records.com) □



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# IN WARD

"I have seen the future of FM radio, and it is owned by Rupert Murdoch," sighs Matthew Ward over the phone from his home in Portland, Oregon. His new album *Transistor Radio: Memories Of A Utopian Radio Power* is dedicated to independent broadcasters. "The conservative night at the moment has the upper hand," he continues. "It's had this ripple effect into every aspect of culture, in my opinion. That's the hardest thing about living in America right now. It has an effect on the way we communicate in every way, especially on television and radio, there is a censorship that is happening. Whether it's labelled as such I don't know, certain voices are being muffled as they are challenging the president. On a bigger scale it has this ripple effect into people's thought processes and that ends up having an effect on every part of every American city."

Half-Mexican, half-American, Ward grew up in Ventura County north of Los Angeles and started playing guitar when he discovered an abandoned instrument in his brother's closet. Step by step he copied Lefty Frazzelli, Link Wray, Chet Atkins, Django Reinhardt and Andres Segovia, and later collaborated with alternative Country artists like Giant Sand's Howe Gelb and Vic Chesnutt. Ward's music is an amalgam of Americana: bluegrass, folk, rock 'n' roll and blues. "I'm always learning other people's songs," he says. "Lately it's been older songs, songs that I grew up with. I'm still putting myself through this self-education process. I hope I never stop. I don't ever want to feel I've graduated from learning about the instrument and music because that's when it starts to decay." He admits his music is "a combination of me and the millions of people I've imitated in my life. But it's mostly just imitations of better singers. Probably about a 30/70 split in their favour." But he shrugs off accusations of inauthenticity. "Everything has to come from something," he argues. "I think it goes against the law of physics to say that it doesn't."

*Transfiguration Of Vincent* – Ward's 2003 album triggered by the loss of a friend, and dedicated to John

Fahey – famously contained a slow strumming version of "Let's Dance", a melancholy masterpiece turning Bowie's original upbeat 80s disco ball into a desolate sphere of tumbleweed. Ward's broken, husky whisper begs for a "dance to a song that's playing on the radio... sway through a crowd to an empty space", as a mouth-forgone whistles in a dilapidated roadside diner. In Bowie's version, the imitation "Let's Dance" is an energetic proposition; in Ward's version the subtlety is this ain't never gonna happen – but his downbeat rasp is always tinged with optimism.

*Transistor Radio* – his fourth album – achieves a gorgeous balance between the meanderingly saccharine and the deeply tragic. "You want your projects to be able to stand up on their own two feet and have their own balance," he says, "so you add weight to side A or side B or the intro or the outro or the sadness or the happiness of a sentiment. I am naive but I believe the truth is simple and balanced. The music is not trying to sway people into feeling one way or another. The music is just trying to sway."

For some, Ward's sound has something of a Levi's advert about it – giving the new a fake-antique crust. And indeed the added sepia effect soaking through Ward's throaty blues is unmistakable. The cover of *Transistor Radio*, all browns and sun-dried orange, displays a bookshelf stacked with soil, a fading image of an angel, yellowing manuscripts and book spines, one of which bears the title *How To Sing Statistics And Hide The Truth*. How deliberately does he cultivate his artificially aged sound? "It is my opinion that recording technology reached its peak at Sun Studios in the middle of the last century," he declares, "and with each new piece of digital technology it is digging deeper into its own grave. Digital technology is a screen that filters out noise, and noise is what makes humans sound human and instruments sound like instruments."

With so many contemporary artists exploring American roots music – artists like CocoRosie and

Devendra Banhart eagerly reference homegrown folk and blues, while the racks currently groan with Fahey-lovin' fingerpickers – protectionist US politics have ushered in an attendant introspection about national identity. "America is snotty and adolescent and Europe is a wise old soul trying to find out what's happening over here," Ward sighs. "When you talk about traditional music in Europe it's a lot more clear cut – there is not a lot of question as to what traditional Irish music, say, sounds like. When you talk about traditional American music it could sound like bluegrass, blues, jazz, early folk music, native American music, early rock 'n' roll – because the country is so young we don't even know what our traditions sound like."

Growing up on spirituals and old hymns back in his local Ventura church, Ward discovered the gritty spiritual blues of Elizabeth Cotten. "I was a huge Firehose fan, they have a great song called 'In Memory Of Elizabeth Cotten'." Firehose was my first experience of live music... They came out with this song and I found out who she was and that sort of opened up this different avenue in guitar playing," he explains. "I believe it's easier to play 100 notes per measure than it is to play the three right ones, and as a guitarist growing up in the 80s it was brutally easy to find the former and close to impossible to find the latter. But then later you discover people like Chet Atkins, and Miles Davis, and Louis Armstrong and John Fahey, who have learned how to play the space between notes. There is a simplicity there. I know when I go to museums the best photographs are the ones that allow for space and negative space and there are musicians who are able to translate that idea. The great painters are able to do that, the great architects are able to do that and great film makers – it's all lumped into one to me." □ *Transistor Radio: Memories Of A Utopian Radio Power* is out now on Matador



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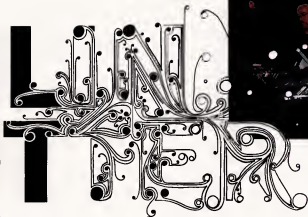


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WATERTIGHT PRODUCTIONS. BY ROB YOUNG



"With many of the things I work on," says Colin Potter, an Englishman working in the grey zone between electronic soundscaping, field recording, textural improv and environmental music, "if I feel I can add something in a creative way, suggest ways of processing things or adding sounds, then I will make suggestions. I'm lucky in that with most of the people I work with, I have sort of crossed over from being the person looking after the technicalities to being part of the creative process."

An accomplished producer, engineer and label owner, Potter has run his IC (Integrated Circuit) Studios for more than 20 years – the studio of choice for Nurse With Wound and Current 93. He also fraternises with a small circle of musicians, such as Ora, Organum, Klin, Andrew Chalk, Paul Bradley and Jonathan Coleclough, dedicated to finely tuned explorations and delicate evocations of place. Check his Coleclough collaboration, *Low Ground*, which starts with the crunching of woodland mulch underfoot and opens out into a gold brail of drone and processed twigthwacking.

Potter's introduction to experimental music came in the early 1970s, while at university in York. For years afterwards he scribbled together enough recording equipment to open a small studio in a disused water tower in Preston, Lancashire. "Being the 'local' studio," he recalls, "I did all sorts of work, from the sublime to the ridiculous, but it taught me a lot and enabled me to keep technically improving."

Running a commercial studio brought some unusual offers. "You get to work on all sorts of recordings," he says. "One of the first big commissions I got was to provide sound effects for a new museum – Eden Camp in North Yorkshire, a former Second World War POW camp. I must have made a good job of it, as I kept getting asked to do more and more sound effects work

and began to amass a large library of material. One of the biggest jobs was for the National Fishing Heritage Centre in Grimby."

All the while he kept his own work on a slow simmer. "This was the start of the DIY period, when people began to produce and distribute their own work, mainly via the democratic medium of the cassette tape. I ended up working with a lot of the people from that scene because I had a 'proper' studio and they knew that I would be sympathetic. Andrew Chalk was an early visitor to the studio, along with Darren Tate. I found what they were doing fascinating – combining many elements, musical, environmental, surreal, electronic – and I gradually got more involved, rather than just being a passive engineer. [In 1991] this became known as Ora, which also received contributions in the form of supplied raw material from Lol Coshill, Aho Dee, Jonathan Coleclough and Daisuke Suzuki."

Ora and their offshoots, like Monos (Potter with Darren Tate), immerse themselves in peculiarly gritty drone pieces, atmospheric meditations and longform improvisations. "Quite often, a piece will begin with a recording made in some particular location and other sounds will be found to complement it. These can come from anything – instruments, electronics, sample manipulation, more environmental recording."

"A good piece of drone music will fill a space like nothing else," he adds, "and it can be something in which to immerse yourself as if your whole body becomes 'tuned in' to the frequency. Sometimes it becomes an accompaniment to your own internal improvisation – something that's happening inside your head. It can be like a journey. But not necessarily from A to B."

Appropriately, a chance meeting led to him regularly collaborating with Current 93 and Nurse With Wound.

"I used to do a lot of cassette copying for many of the small labels on the experimental scene in the early/mid-80s," Potter recalls. "David Tibet's parents lived nearby. Steve [Stapleton] and David realised that I had a studio and that I would be sympathetic to what they were doing, so they started using me for some of the Current 93 and Nurse With Wound recordings. I suppose I began as 'the engineer', but gradually, as we got used to each other, I would suggest things – sound effects, processes."

Last summer Potter accompanied Stapleton to the Lofoten Islands off northern Norway to make the Shipwreck Radio project. As part of a local art event, the pair were given access to a small studio and challenged to make field recordings around the island, then to adapt them into music pieces to be broadcast over the local radio network. His previous work with the fishing industry stood him in good stead. "We used sounds sourced from a particular environment, not exactly to paint a picture of that area, but to give an impression of it or to add a specific resonance – a spirit of place." They returned with many hours of 'sonic footage', and have already released a double CD as volume one of a proposed series. "My best memory of the Shipwreck Radio project is the feeling of freedom," he reflects. "But to be given carte blanche to do anything, to use anything, was pretty liberating. That said, having to record three radio programmes a week wasn't exactly liberating, although in fact it gave us a level of discipline. The whole project made me realise that sound is a very 'elastic' resource – you can do pretty much anything with it." □ Ora's *Morgendämmerung 10* is out this month on Die Stadt. Nurse With Wound's Shipwreck Radio Volume One is on ICR/United Dames. ICR info: [www.icrdistribution.com](http://www.icrdistribution.com)

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# WALLY SHOUP

CATERWAUL OF SOUND. BY DAVID KEENAN



Thanks to a run of high-profile releases on the Leo label and hook-ups with heavy hitters like Sonic Youth guitarist Thurston Moore and drummer Chris Corsano, Seattle saxophonist Wally Shoup is rapidly becoming one of the more visible representatives of a leftfield, self-supporting network of free improvising musicians who operate outside of the orbit of major American jazz centres like New York and Chicago. Alongside players like New England's Paul Fiherty, Alabama's Davey Williams and LaDonna Smith, and Colorado's Jack Wright, Shoup has been tearing at the margins for several decades now, self-releasing a slew of beautiful cassette documents that interrogate the liminal space between jazz, improvisation and freeform blurt.

"There are always mavericks in any city," Shoup maintains, "people who're drawn to the deeper end of the pool musically, and they tend to find one another. I've always found kindred spirits. I moved to Birmingham, Alabama in 1981 and Davey Williams and LaDonna Smith were important people to me, their commitment to free playing and their view of it as a poetic, surrealist experience was and still is inspiring and motivating. Plus, the way they incorporated their Southern roots into the 'non-idiomatic' language was influential, since I strongly feel playing abstract music should reveal who you are, not be something you learn and then hide behind."

Shoup's sound is highly vocal, a mix of gutbucket blues, wrenching atonal squall and pure hallelujah that's informed by a childhood spent absorbing the styles of wild secular singers like Little Willie John, James Brown, Wilson Pickett and Bobby Bland. "I grew up in the South during the 50s and 60s and was attracted to black music from a very young age, mostly through black radio stations," he explains. "I was drawn to the fervour of the singers' voices, the screamers and shouters, they really got to me. I listened mostly to rock 'n' roll, R&B and soul until the late 60s, when I got exposed to free jazz and psychedelia. The good stuff had that same quality of fervour and naked emotionality that the 50s black

singers had. Pharoah Sanders's *Karma*, John Coltrane's *Meditations* and Albert Ayler's *Spiritual Unity* knocked me out. I listened to everything I could, everything that had that element of spunk and weirdness: Cecil Taylor, electric Miles, Beethoart, Hampton Grease Band, Stooges, Art Ensemble, Braxton, ESP-Disk... read about it too, the radical politics, the intentions behind it, the reasons it sounded 'weird', the challenge to consumerism, etcetera, and I had my own personal revolution as a result of the music. I began to see and hear things in a broader, more radical way."

Shoup first picked up the saxophone in 1970, primarily as a way of "letting off steam". But given his background – white, Southern, working class – he struggled with concerns over his own authenticity. Exposure to the alternative improvisatory tactics posited by Derek Bailey and Evan Parker's Music Improvisation Company signposted a way out of this particular cultural impasse. "I heard it as an extension of free jazz and abstraction in general," he relates. "It was less pulse-oriented, and that led to even weirder shapes, phrases and textures. It was a music exclusively for the imagination, with no historical reference points. This conflagrating of free jazz and British free improvisation led to me discovering a music within myself that was both personal and necessary." In 1981 Shoup released his debut LP, *Scree-Run Waltz*, a wild face-off with percussionist Ross Robin in the style of the early Paul Lytton/Evan Parker duos. Over the next 13 years he went on to release nine cassettes that documented everything from a collection of alto sax solos and a trio with Davey Williams and LaDonna Smith to a concrete assemblage of found sound and overdubbed sax. But it wasn't until the release of *Project W* on CD by Apraxine in 1994, showcasing the trio of Shoup, cellist Brent Amold and drummer Ed Pias, that the saxophonist fully broke cover. Thurston Moore was one of the few who were listening and early on the two made contact, cutting the ferocious *Hurricane Floyd*

issued by Subingui in 2000 in the company of percussionist Toshi Makihara. The duo hooked up again in 2003 for the *Live At Toxic* quartet set that also featured Paul Fiherty on saxophone and Chris Corsano on drums. "I learned that Thurston had bought a copy of *Scree-Run Waltz* way back when and was aware of my subsequent cassette work," Shoup reveals. "Thurston, much to his credit, keeps up with lesser known musicians, poets and writers if he feels they're doing authentic work. In 1998 he invited my group *Project W*, then featuring Brent Amold on cello and Jeph Jerman on drums, to open for Sonic Youth and it was terrific. We just played like we normally did and their audience dug it. Since then we've done some playing and recording together and it's invariably been an enriching experience. I've played with a lot of electric guitar players, 'played' one myself more or less with drills and files, and have learned to make my sax work with whatever they're up to."

Shoup's most routinely charged group is his current trio, featuring bassist Reuben Radding and drummer Bob Rees. The trio's latest release, *Blue Purgé*, is their most expressly energetic to date, with the set programmed in order to build towards a central point of overwhelming physicality. "Improvising, to me, is about staying in the moment, staying focused on the thing you're creating collectively with others," Shoup insists. "Fast, high energy playing makes it easier to stay there – you don't have time to think – but any playing that remains intense and focused, not distracted or meandering, is worth pursuing. I think improvising helps you discover your spontaneous self, the one that actually likes surprises and takes delight in free falling, free association and caterwauling. The longer this self stays in control the better. It's just more open and creative than the analytical self. Of course, it has to learn its limits and not be destructive or domineering. So, I don't look at improvising so much as catharsis, but as a means to access this spontaneous self and give it free rein. Although, in the end, that might well amount to the same thing." □





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## BERLIN



Industrial revival: Club Moral at [moral.de/teaser](http://moral.de/teaser)

In summer 2004, a festival of Industrial music called [ironframe.de/festival](http://ironframe.de/festival), set on the banks of Berlin's River Spree, encapsulated the difficulties plaguing the contemporary subgenres of Dark Ambient, power electronics and neo-folk. Organised by Stefan Schwanke, veteran of the 1980s West Berlin Industrial scene and head of the successful Website and label [ironframe](http://ironframe.de), this celebration of the release of *Statement 1961*, a stunningly packaged double CD/LP/7" compilation, turned out as headliners Der Blutharsch pulled out at the last minute. More than 250 punters cancelled their bookings as a result. A bill that included Clock DVA's Paul Browne, cult group Club Moral and a reunion of Bremen's Gerechtigkeits Liga – the first signing on SPK's 1980s Side Effects label – was still not 'big name' enough to break even.

For some of us whose ten years fell in the early 80s, the image of this city is the romantic one: bleak, paranoid, besieged West Berlin, its radical squatting community and Industrial music scene, with festivals like *Atonal* and the 'Geniale Örtlichkeiten' groups, an ironic phrase coined by Bluta Bergard. I describe the 'amateur genres' of Berlin's Industrial underground such as *Einschränkende Neubauten*, *Mafanai*, *Spring Aus Den Wolken* and *Die Tödlische Dons*. Nowadays, Neubauten sell out 5000-seat arenas, and icons like Whitehouse, Sarcide, Laibach, Coil and Psychic TV can fill the former East Berlin's Volksbühne theatre. Meanwhile, at the Podewil, just off Alexanderplatz, artists like Amos Tschickes, Jonathan Colecough, Gilbert/Lewis, and The Hafler Trio played throughout last year. Podewil still pulls hundreds, creating a sense of continuity and commitment.

But Industrial music per se is far from visible. The *Steinsche Zelle* club in Prenzlauerberg – the East Berlin worker district where a squat/alternative scene quickly began to thrive after the Wall came down in 1989 – is perhaps the only dedicated Industrial venue in town. Run by members of the group *Column One*, it has showcased acts like *Troum*, *Major Tn* and *Runkelstirn* & *Gurgelstock*. If there are hardly ever more than 30 people present, it's worth remembering that even Neubauten started small. Clubs across the city now host Industrial nights as part of a wider reaching alternative agenda. Prenzlauerberg also hosts *Bastard* and *Ausland*; there's *Mara* in neighbouring Mitte; the *Inox Kapell Museum* in Kreuzberg; K17 in Friedrichshagen and *Archiv* in Potsdam. *Mara* and *Bastard* are the most visible and contemporary, hosting everyone from Chicks

On Speed and *Deerhoof* to *Puppetmastaz* and *The Locust* while maintaining a strong identity and sense of engagement. K17 caters to Goth/Electronic Body Music or extreme Metal crowds, and feels more static and less vibrant. Joining the 100-strong crowd for bombastic 'neoclassical' Industrial act *In Slaughter Natives* K17 gig felt like infiltrating a cult assembly. On the other hand, seeing *Lightning Bolt* pull as many people for their show at *Zentral* felt historic. Nowadays, *Lightning Bolt* chime closer to Berlin's mentality – the harshly experimental clashing with the hedonistically dance-orientated. Ultimately, the most sweat is generated at *Electroclash*/new wave clubs like *Rio*.

In terms of visibility and influence, then, Berlin as a dystopian metropolis is all but extinct, suicidal black-clad Blixx clones of the 80s giving way to shiny, happy *Shoreditch* types. A 90s scene like the one around *Alec Empire's* DHR label welded punk to rave using Industrial white noise. *Empire* left the city in the early 90s and former DHR artists assimilated into disparate Berlin scenes, *Coltra Klier* most notably serving as a link between *Derail* and *Electroclash*. Several Goth/derivative/EBM club nights operate on a weekly basis, where Industrial hovers above like a spectre. Its degenerating DNA strands, surviving rave, Techno and Trance, now lace what is essentially a retro scene – codified, commodified, dancefloor commercialised and divorced from the ideal of a groundbreaking musical and artistic community. [ironframe](http://ironframe.de)'s Schwanke, equal measures passionate and bitter, has lived through Berlin's dramatic transformations in two decades, and tries to find a balance between past and present.

'The times are definitely gone where you would hang out with *Blita*, *Nick Cave*, *Diamonda* [Galas] and the *Neubauten* in a *Kreuzberg* bar until 11am,' he despairs. 'What was really funny back then is that really nobody wanted to come and live here. The city really lived a shadow existence compared with the rest of Germany. People loved to live here for all the reasons regarded as negative by most. But don't get me wrong, I'm not for only listening to old records – the contemporary Industrial scene is still exciting in terms of quality releases. It's just record stores that disappeared and concerts not taking place as often anymore. Beneath the surface the scene has always remained strong. However, today's consumer mentality is often commercialised and narrow-minded.'

But contemporary Industrial music has a much more

distressing infiltration than consumerism to contend with – racism and neo-Nazism, variously disguised as 'revolutionary conservatism', 'nationalist anarchism' 'warrior paganism' or anti-Zionism. The aforementioned *Der Blutharsch* have been condemned as Nazis more than once. Indeed, last autumn they were prevented from performing in Tel-Aviv. But why 'Nazis' would want to play in the land of the Jews (as well as release an album on Israeli Industrial label *Tophet Prophet*) is anyone's guess. The Israeli concert promoters circulated a press release that vehemently defended Industrial's tautological use of totalitarian motifs, and quoted *Der Blutharsch's* Albin Julius attacking anti-Semites in Web forums.

Industrial has always dealt with 'political incorrectness' and, like punk, injected heavy left humanitarianism with a healthy dose of urban rage. Throbbing *Gristle's* use of military uniforms and Laibach's 'love-identification' with fascism were part of an investigation of the contradictions within the West's democratic paradigm. Both treated totalitarianism as an archetype dormant within liberalism.

The problem is that many Industrial groups now ape these tendencies irresponsibly or superficially, exploit them for instant notoriety, or blatantly misunderstand them and reclaim them as Nazi. Therefore, any foray into this scene nowadays requires the utmost caution and analytical vigilance to be able to draw a thin line separating the artistic fringe from the political one, free speech from capitulation to cynical manipulation. A name like [ironframe](http://ironframe.de) can raise some eyebrows among the uninitiated, and, in truth, the initiated as well.

A glance down the list of contributing artists to the *Statement 1961* compilation doesn't immediately clarify matters either. It takes a careful reading of the inner booklet to find out that groups called *Sigilum S* or *Grey Wolves* are not Nazi sympathisers in any way. The former deal with 'an innocent sonic environment... micro-instrumentation... bioacoustic research in acoustic fields', while the latter reflect on Germany's Nazi and socialist past through recalling a family car ride alongside the Wall, son asking father what does the graffiti '666' mean. Reading *Con-Don's* harsh critique of the way a freshly unified Germany dealt with rising race violence in its former Eastern half, one can establish that this magnificent piece of work is perhaps not 'safe' in a prepackaged multicultural PC sort of way, but it is as far as can be from being a Nazi Trojan horse. □

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# KEN

# WANDERMARK

TESTED BY MIKE BARNES, PHOTOS BY JOHN HOOPER



## GYÖRGY LIGETI TEN PIECES FOR WIND QUINTET

FROM THE GYÖRGY LIGETI EDITION 3 (SONY CLASSICAL) 1996

I don't know it, let me make some guesses. I'm guessing he's still alive.

**He is. He's quite elderly now.**

Kage? I've got no idea who it is.

**It's Ligeti.**

I never would have guessed it.

**I read that you like his music.**

Yeah, I really love his stuff. Somehow I associate his music with places that are more extreme, more regimented, the mechanical pieces. That definitely really threw me, that slow cycle of notes. I wouldn't have thought it was him. It's usually so layered with the rhythms and the sound, and this is a lot more linear than some of the pieces I know. OK, I'm off to an excellent start [laughs].

**When did his music begin to influence you?**

I listened to a lot at home when I was growing up. My father listened to lots of different kinds of music. I know a lot of his early stuff like the piece from 2001 that everybody's heard [Lux Aeterna], and other pieces around that time. I'm really attracted to his sounds and his canonicity. After he heard the [Conlon] Nancarrow [player-piano] pieces, they affected his thinking, when he started writing the piano pieces. He adopted something that was striking to him, kind of degrading it and putting it into his own music.

But the kind of writing he does for the strings and for the winds too, the kinds of chords and quality of the extended sounds what I'd like to be able to do better in my own writing. Elliott Carter's music is amazing, for example, but it would be a bit limiting to apply that sort of approach to the music I'm interested in. It's so complex that the room for the improviser gets reduced and it's hard to see where you can add between the rhythmic contours and the harmonic contours. But Ligeti is interesting because I can hear the room in there. I definitely wouldn't say that I've been successful at adopting those things in my own music but they excite me and those are all elements that could be brought to larger groups like The Territory Band.

**I was always taken by Ligeti's dissections of his work. On one movement of his *Concerto* he wanted to give the impression of being "alone and lost". He wanted another place to sound like activity going on under the surface of a pond.**

It would be interesting to collect the directions of composers, whether it's through-composed stuff or improvised music, and see the way that they try to communicate information outside of notation in a conventional sense, because it's really difficult to communicate musical information even with notation. **What sort of directions do you use besides straight notation?**

It really depends on the people you are working with. If you're been working with them for a while, you can usually use a phrase that's a reference point that you both understand as a starting place to describe the music. But generally it's a case of notation in a conventional sense and in some cases graphic descriptions and shorthand – not like interpretative graphic information but more like a gesture on the page indicating a specific set of sounds or musical gesture. Or a combination of those things. To me it's to get people off the page and to the music quicker.

## JOE HARRIOTT & JOHN MAYER DOUBLE QUINTET

"GANA"

FROM INDO-JAZZ FUSIONS 1 & 2 (POLYGRAM) 1997

Is that the Indo-Jazz Fusions stuff with Joe Harriott? OK, I don't really know this stuff so well at all. The stuff that I like by Harriott are the group albums like *Free Form* and *Abstract* – some of that is totally incredible. But I'm not really interested in this sort of

hybrid of World Music and jazz. Both the approaches to the music tend to suffer a bit. There were people who found out I was doing that Joe Harriott thing [Ken Vandermark's Joe Harriott Project] and said, "Check this out", but I was not so keen.

**Do you think it sounds a bit kitsch?**

Like some of the [Jimmy] Guiffre stuff at the time and other people in the late 50s, it was all about the question: What do we do next? You had these fascinating experiments. Some would fail, some would be successful and they would be side by side on a recording. In hindsight we could say that some of these threads led to something very productive, while these threads became stiff and didn't really develop. **A lot of jazz traffic to the UK originated in the USA, but Harriott was an original voice whose music was travelling the other way.**

My father was a knowledgeable guy in terms of music. He had heard about Harriott at the time, so definitely his name was coming over to people who were following the more adventurous aspects of what was going on – which is impressive because the States can be very closed in terms of outside ideas and impact. **Is a free jazz cover of someone else's music something of a contradiction in terms?**

I don't really think so. The way I've looked at it, there have been many, many interpretations of jazz standards, like "Autumn Leaves" or a Thelonious Monk tune. They offer inspiration and materials for improvisers to work with, either in performance or on record. That kind of attitude about working with other people's material happened quite a bit in the 50s when Miles Davis, for example, played Thelonious Monk pieces and other people were playing Miles Davis tunes.

More and more in the 60s it seemed that the interpretations of a composition were done by the person who wrote it, with the group they were working in – that would pretty much be it. And it seems to me that, well, Eric Dolphy wrote great pieces, why can't they be reinterpreted? And not necessarily that the [new interpretations] would be superior, but that they would be valid. In doing all the projects with The Vandermark Five with different composers – more recently with Sonny Rollins and Rashawn Roland Kirk – those pieces offered a lot of possibilities that could be re-examined or maybe thought about differently. To me it doesn't seem contradictory, it's just mistaken to be used.

Sitting down and trying to transcribe a player/composer's work, to look at the mechanisms involved, is extremely informative. You find out there were a lot of things about a piece of music that you thought you might know, but it turns out it was only a superficial understanding. It seems like a lot of people aren't interested in doing that. There are whole decades of great compositions that haven't been reimagined and you could spend a lifetime looking at these pieces. OK, well I got one night [laughs].

## THE THING "HAVE LOVE WILL TRAVEL"

FROM GARAGE (SMALLTOWN SUPERJAZZ) 1994

[Immediately] OK, I know who this is. This is Mats [Gustafsson]'s tno, The Thing. I'm pretty sure I played Mats The Sonics' original, so indirectly I had something to do with his decision. This is an amazing band. I'm a bit jealous because I really wanted to do something with [bass player] Ingebrigt Håker Flaten [and drummer] Paal Nilssen-Love in a tno, but I feel like I can't touch that now.

**Do you think that this is a successful way of playing garage rock?**

From knowing Mats and his discussions of it, I think that he's really looking for something to break through and he's trying to find a way to integrate really raw rock stuff like The Stooges or The Sonics with improvised music in a fluid way. It's strange, in a

One of composer, improvising saxophonist and bass clarinetist Ken Vandermark's favourite musicians, James Brown, was famously dubbed 'the hardest working man in showbusiness'. But the epithet could just as accurately be applied to Vandermark himself. The groups he currently plays and records with include The Vandermark 5, The Ken Vandermark Trio, AALY Trio, Spaceways Inc, Territory Band, School Days, Free Music Ensemble, Tripleplay, Free Fall, Sound In Action Trio, Peter Brötzmann Chicago Tentet, Sonore and Bridge 61. Some of these play only sporadically, but add to this list his solo recordings, duos – most recently with bass player Brian Diblee and with drummer Paal Nilssen-Love – and collaborations, and Vandermark's ceaseless creative activity, both in concert and in the studio, has already created a formidable body of work.

Born in 1964, Vandermark has been playing tenor saxophone since the age of 16 and more recently introduced the bass clarinet and baritone saxophone into his armory. Currently resident in Chicago, he is a keystone of that city's jazz and improv scenes. In 1996 he helped set up the Empty Bottle as a venue for improvising musicians, and has recently begun directing its Chicago Improvisers Series, in which local ensembles are offered month-long residencies.

Vandermark's work in Chicago and worldwide has earned him recognition from local publications and institutions. This has ranged from his selection as one of the Chicagoans of the Year in *The Chicago Tribune* in 1994 to the inclusion of The Vandermark 5 in the Chicago Museum of Contemporary Art's exhibition, *Art In Chicago: 1945-1995*. Vandermark has also been picked by the art weekly *New City* as one of the 45 Chicagoans having the greatest impact on the nation's music industry. Add to that his appearance in national and international critics' polls and you have a list of awards and press plaudits that complements his discography in its extensiveness. The Jukebox took place in London.

sense, that this is a piece on the album because live the music stretches, coming to and leaving a riff, and things are kind of superimposed and flexible.

I really love a lot of rock music and like Mats, I'm very interested in integrating things that I like listening to into the music I play. I'm trying to figure out a different way to do it, though. I'd rather isolate the elements that I like and build on that as opposed to taking the piece itself. You've put me in a difficult position [laughs]. The way I think about the stuff is quite a bit different to the way Mats does.

I think the question that you're leading to is how is a piece by Ornette Coleman different to The Sonics if you use them as material? I can't speak for Mats, but my impression is that he would say there was no difference and the argument could be made that that's true. But the materials in a piece by Ornette Coleman and a piece by The Sonics represent a very different way of thinking. The rhythmic and melodic characteristics of "Have Love Will Travel" are quite a bit different to Ornette's "Round Trip", let's say. I find the material to be more open-ended with Ornette Coleman in terms of where I can go and remain true to the character. I played that sort of [rock] stuff directly in a Chicago group called The Waste Kings and I really love it. But to be true to it, you've got to hold on to characteristics that aren't as open-ended.

I'd say we both think that there are elements in the state of the music right now that are too set. The list of people in groups that I see that really change the way I think about things is not long enough and I find that really disappointing. I think a lot of my motivation right now is to find things that will shake myself up, and hopefully shake things up for the musicians around me. Good music isn't enough. And whether we succeed at something beyond that or not, I think it's very important to strive for something that's moving outside the realm of what we know.

#### Which rock groups do you like?

I got to rock very late. I guess I have a sort of elitist family background where we listened to jazz and classical. There was a lot of Motown and Sly And The Family Stone in there too. The majority of it was 'art' music. I kind of dragged that attitude around with me [laughs] and was pretty snobbish about popular forms of music. When I got to college, no one really knew a damn thing about what I was familiar with. That's when I learned that what I really loved was music and in order to be able to talk about music, I had to find out about this other kind of stuff. At that point it was *Wilder* and *The Replacements*, the SST groups, so that would be in the mid-80s. I tend to like stuff that's pretty hard-sounding. A band like The Jesus Lizard were really important to me both with their intensity and also rhythmically. The distorted element of that group was the vocal part. Their vocalist Dave Yow was really extraordinary. It was like he took the more extreme characteristics of *Iggy Pop*'s singing on *Furthur* and kind of built a world out of that.

#### ISOTOPE 217

##### "HODAH"

FROM COMMANDER MANDUCK (AESTHETICS) 1999

I don't know it

It involves people from where you live.

This is Rob Mazurek's project? Is it the new one, Black God Ensemble?

It's a Mazurek group, Isotope 217, remixed by Bundy K Brown and Casey Rice as Commander Mindfuck and yes, I'm interested in the Chicago axis of Tortoise, Isotope, Chicago Underground ensembles, HIM, and so on?

I don't really know that music really well. The improvising guys from that circle hung out with a different crowd, I guess. Chicago is a really expansive place [laughs]. They work a lot with the Tortoise musicians and it's a different pool of people. I played

a little bit with [drummer] Chad Taylor, and a little bit with [guitarist] Jeff Parker and Rob. We are friendly with each other but maybe the aesthetic interests are a bit different, so we don't play together. And Rob's living in Brazil now and Chad's in New York again. When that pool was all centred in Chicago they were simultaneous but not cross-pollinating in terms of playing together.

**Has any of your music been remixed, or have you reconfigured raw material after the event, like this example?**

No, I've got raw material and reconfigured it at the time [laughs]. Yeah, I can see the interest in that and it makes complete sense. Part of what attracts me about improvised music is, it's in that time, whether it's recorded or in concert, and I don't think I'm so interested in having that performance remanipulated into another artefact. When I use the studio I use it as a documentary tool. There's a long argument for why you should use the studio as a tool in itself and on the electric Miles stuff the results are incredible. For me, using it that way isn't as interesting as creating and manipulating the material in a live situation, documenting that and leaving it be.

#### FAST 'N' BULBOUS

##### "SUGAR N SPIKES"

FROM PORK CHOP SLIDZ AROUND THE RING (JUNEBORE) 2008

**This is a new release but you might know this music. Is it Beefheart's music?**

It's The New York group Fast 'N' Bulbous with arrangements by saxophonist Phil Johnston, and Gary Lucas from The Magic Band on guitar. It's hard, because I really love the stuff so I miss Beefheart, his singing and the texts. But it's pretty remarkable that they were able to do this. I think they are really successful getting the character of this music across, but it's so different without him.

**You were saying that you grew up with jazz and classical music, mainly. What led you to Beefheart?**

The first thing I heard was *True Music Replicas* in the mid-80s and I didn't really like that. It seemed really pretentious to me. But later when I went to Chicago, a friend of mine had some of Beefheart's stuff and I thought I should check it out. It was some of the later stuff – I think it was *Ice Cream For Crow* – and it just blew me away completely. There's a lot of Howlin' Wolf in his singing and it's like an abstraction from a blues sensibility. There's something really beautiful and exposed about Beefheart's music even when the lyrics may be surreal. It's interesting that Beefheart and Zappa were a bit together because even though I have a huge amount of respect for Frank Zappa's music, it doesn't really speak to me very much. Part of that is there's a distance in Zappa's music, but Beefheart's music lets you in and says, "This is who I am and this is how I feel".

I've seen footage of the [later Magic Band] playing live. When they play, they play all out. That was really great because although it was art music, it kept it from being precious and it was in your face 100 per cent. I love that about it. It's amazing that, for whatever sets of reasons, he got to a point and said "I'm done" and walked away from it and decided to only focus on painting. I have a lot of respect for that. That takes a lot of guts.

#### EVAN PARKER & PAUL LYTON

##### "BUT FOR THE MIST (FOR ERIK ZARKO)"

FROM THREE OTHER STORIES (REANIMATE) 1971-74

Is this Evan with Lyton? I recognise that vocal thing [Parker snarling].

**Parker has done more collaborative stuff in recent years but looking back, this sounds like the product of a fiercely uncompromising era.**

I think it was and in many ways still is uncompromising. Knowing Paul Lyton a bit and playing

with him, I've talked to him a lot about what he was doing then, his relationship with these people and what they were working on, and I have to say I'm fascinated by the way this crew of English musicians arrived at their materials. It was uncompromising and it was, it seems to me, in reaction to the American jazz at the time, in trying to find their appreciation for that art and understanding of it, meant they had to find their own thing. What seems to be lost on some people is that they actually understood and revered the music so much, they had to turn away from it to find their own.

From talking to Paul and also a little bit to Evan Parker about it, I don't know anyone who knows John Coltrane's music better than them. They would listen, analyse and take elements of it that they built into things that they went on to discover themselves. To me it resembles a lot of what took place in the States in the visual arts in the 40s, where there was a lot of negation to find different sets of aesthetics. The English scene seemed to work in somewhat similar ways but with music – there's a sense of abstraction against the conventions of American jazz.

The stories are that they really fought about this stuff. I just did a tour with Phil Wachsmann and Paul Lyton, and they were talking about great arguments they'd had over things like, "You played a major third", minute things that represent music conventions on a level that is mind-boggling. But they needed to do that. Now, after the fact, I have played with them and other European players who all broke insane amounts of ground – people like Peter Brötzmann and Paul Lovens. As a younger American, my relationship to their work is obviously quite a bit different, so I don't have the same issues with dogmatic purity. To me it's a whole set of aesthetics that are there to be used and developed into other things. I certainly wouldn't say that I have a better perspective on what they've been working on than they do – that would be complete idiocy. But I've a different relationship to it. Some of the innovations that Evan Parker's made on the saxophone could be applied to a music that he might not want them applied to, or that he wouldn't choose himself. To me there's a whole pool of information there – it's OK, I can use that, I can steal that.

To hear them playing their music even now, you hear the intensity of creative action. It's like a lot's at stake, and that's what I'm looking for in my own work and the work I hear around me. And I get frustrated when it's not there.

**You often play in duos with a drummer...**

The things I hear are melody and rhythm. I don't hear things harmonically, so it's one of my favourite formats because it reduces it down to the essentials. I would say I relate to things rhythmically before anything else, maybe even the melody.

#### KEVIN DRUMM & LASSE MARHAUG

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FROM FROZEN BY SUZZARD WINDS

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**Didn't Lasse record with you recently?**

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character to it. Peal had done some duo work with Lasse and said that he could do all this stuff, so I was really excited about it.

## OLIVER LAKE QUINTET "HAT AND BEARD"

FROM PROPHET (BLACK SAINT) 1981

[Whistles along] This is Dolphy's [tune]... I don't know the version. Is this one of Oliver Lake's things? OK, yeah, Oliver Lake is somebody who's been investigating Dolphy's stuff for years and years. I think he was part of the St Louis Black Artists Group [BAG] with Julius Hemphill and I think they knew it from there.

**When this was made in 1981, improvised music was more marginalised.**

Yeah, in the 80s there was definitely a real neo-conservative aspect happening in the music and an interest in what seemed to be like saving jazz from itself [laughs], which was really criminal, you know? And now there is more of an active interest in things that are outside of whatever mainstream jazz might be. But the music never went away. There were always people performing it.

One of the best concerts I'd ever seen was Don Cherry and Eddie Blackwell for two nights in a room this size playing to 20 people. I think the problem was the music's visibility. It kept on developing and kept on moving, and here we are 20 years later and it's in a totally different place. But I think there's a complete ignorance from the American jazz media about developments, due to its attachment to the jazz mainstream. That music has a place too, but there's a lot of political reasons for the emphasis on the jazz mainstream in the United States. It's attached to conservatories, education systems and establishing jazz as the new classical music, which includes arts funding. The Lincoln Center gets a lot of money to support its viewpoint and programming of their version of jazz, and that has impact in the United States.

There's all these other people who are doing exciting things and that thread of development is vibrant and a living perspective on where the music is now. It's not concerned with maintaining the "classic" sense of what the art was.

## PARLIAMENT "DR FUNKENSTEIN"

FROM TEAR THE ROOF OFF 1974-1980 (CASABLANCA) 1979

This is Parliament. I got to see these guys play at the Regal Theater in Chicago about ten years ago. They played for four hours – it was completely insane, really amazing. After two hours you reckon, like, "Wow, that was a great concert"; and [George] Clinton just has this incredible ability to keep things moving forward and having another event. After three hours he finally brought Bootsy Collins out and the whole place just about blew up.

I love funk, but my favourite stuff of Clinton's is really the Funkadelic stuff. *Maggot Brain* is one of the great albums. I like the rhythmic flow more because it's a little less regimented. It's like James Brown created a whole new genre of music and then there were people like Clinton, Sly Stone and Curtis Mayfield who developed these things out of that. For two decades, the stuff James Brown developed actually had a huge impact on my own music, maybe not so much in the way it sounds but the way it's organised.

He did a lot of things with visual cues to move the group through to the bridge, for example, or through the different sections and to cue soloists. That kind of stuff in my music comes from seeing James Brown. It's kind of funny how influences don't always come from the sources people think they would. □ Outside The Frame, by Vandermark's group Free Fall (featuring Ingebrigt Håker Flaten and Havard Wik), is out this month on Smalltown Superjazz.



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# CORROSION KNOWS

AFTER MAKING TWO OF THE FINEST BUT OVERLOOKED APOCALYPTIC SINGER-SONGWRITER ALBUMS OF THE EARLY 70S - WITH JAZZ ARRANGER MIKE GIBBS AND FREE GUITARIST RAY RUSSELL - BILL FAY DROPPED OFF THE MAP, LEAVING LISTENERS TO SPECULATE WILDLY ABOUT HIS FATE. AS FAY'S CATALOGUE IS REISSUED THIS MONTH, ALONG WITH A PREVIOUSLY UNHEARD THIRD LP FEATURING GUITARIST GARY SMITH, ROB YOUNG DISCOVERS THE SINGER ALIVE AND WELL, AND STILL POURING OUT A RIVER OF SONG

He is waiting for the rain to anoint him and for the frost to awaken his soul. He has been sitting on the park bench so long in contemplation that the falling leaves fleck his jacket. He sits crosslegged, donkey jacket crumpled around him, head down back warty on the neck, his eyes directed off to the left of the photographer's shoulder. The eyes drink in the shruberies, hazy borders, gaze deep into the bole of the trees, trying to feel, if only for an instant, the ages they have been rooted in.

The sitter is Bill Fay. The image is reproduced on the back cover of the album that bears his name. On the front, in black and white, Fay advances tentatively towards the camera, placed almost at ground level. It seems Fay is gliding across a stretch of water—a miracle occurring on a grey afternoon in London's Hyde Park. Look closer still and the miracle is a prosaic accident. He is standing on a concrete platform and a large puddle of water has gathered after a heavy rainfall.

On the map of British music, Bill Fay has been located in one of the sketchy areas marked by legends and mermaids, and inscribed with the ignominious, "Here be dragons". A one-man song factory who refused a career in a Tin Pan Alley battery farm churning out hits for cash, Fay's piano-pitched liquid gold and he sang in a voice that retained his English pronunciation, the equal of The Kinks' Ray Davies, Procol Harum's Gary Brooker, early Bowie, even John Lennon's early 70s folkie phase. Often misrepresented as another shy soloist to rival the privileged, vulnerable, middle class Nink Drake, Fay—son of a wrought-iron gate maker from the Home Counties—was an autodidact whose break came via the competitive late 60s London pop-psychodelic scene swirling in the wake of The Beatles' Sgt. Pepper. The musicians in his circle were drawn from the era's finest free jazzers and session players, framing his unparalleled lyrics with a looser, rather edge than contemporaneous folk rock arrangements. He could have become a kind of Bernie Taupin for the Vietnam protest generation, if he hadn't so humbly resisted the lures of fame.

His music has started to float to the surface thanks to eclectic and persistent archival work. First came the 2001 release of the two Decca New Albums, *Bill Fay* (1970) and *Time Of The Last Persecution* (1971), on the British See For Miles label. That single CD contained every song officially released by Fay, since it also had the 1967 single "Some Good Advice"/"Screams In The Ears". But it had dropped out of print by 2004—after See For Miles went bankrupt—when Wooden Hill issued *From The Bottom Of An Old Grandfather Clock*, a collection of demos and outtakes from 1966-70.

In the meantime, Fay's music gained the advocacy of people like Jim O'Rourke, Wilco, Matt Deighton (ex-Mother Earth) and David Michael (formerly known as Duffo) of Current 93, whose *Turbo Jnana* label has just issued *Tomorrow Tomorrow And Tomorrow*, an album recorded between 1978-81 but never released. And with the appearance of two new editions of *Bill Fay and Persecution on Canterbury archive label* (Electric in March), there means an unprecedented four albums of Fay will be in print by the end of this month.

Fay himself seems faded and slightly exhausted by all the attention. In a rich and rounded Middlesex accent, his first words when he phones (he won't meet face to face, and unspecified reasons mean he can't receive phone calls) to conduct only the second interview he's ever granted since the early 70s are: "I need things to slow down a bit, and spend more time on the keyboard

working on music. I need to lessen the pace of things at the moment, and do a bit of music, yeah... I'm a little bit troubled by the aspect of being in the pages of a magazine. Because I tend to see it as a little bit grandiose or too self-projecting. Because I do strongly feel that we're all equal, all the way down—no one really knows where music comes from anyway."

Given the lack of available information on Fay, some observers have read a lifetime of pain into the gap between the cover photo of the first LP and that of the following year's *Time Of The Last Persecution*. In the latter's monochrome headshot of Fay, bearded and distracted, many have interpreted some deplorable tragedy, an epic psychic downfall, casting Fay as an Icarus who, like Syd Barrett, flew too close to the sun and fell crashing to earth, spending the next 35 years as a redoubt beyond all hope of rescue. All of this is total fabrication. Those who know and have maintained contact with Fay concur with his own statement that he never stopped making music. Just that a natural humility and the pragmatic need to earn a living stopped him seeking a public persona for his music and reduced the drive to gain a record deal.

"He's not a person to ram anything down anybody's throat," confirms "stoic guitarist" Gary Smith, who has been accompanying Fay since the late 70s. "He's a very modest person, if you're going to sum the whole situation up, integrity would be the one word you would use."

"Music has always been the central thing," Fay confesses. "But you know you just have to accept that the world doesn't owe you a living—just because you may feel you could be putting out good albums, it doesn't mean to say that that's necessarily going to happen. It's just really nice to keep discovering new songs and putting them down on tape, even if nobody else hears them. And I've always done that. So I've just simply accepted the fact that I wasn't an established artist and couldn't keep making albums. But the songs didn't stop. If you know what I mean. To be able to write songs is really a big enough plus."

"The way I see myself is that I'm a listener," he continues. "If I go to the keyboard and something comes that I really feel for, then I will want to play it myself. Things could get added musically so that it becomes full length, and then words can get added. But I see it as me listening."

Fay taught himself piano as a teenager during the early 1960s. In 1962 he went up to Bangor University in Wales to study electronics, influenced in part by his Uncle Ron, a radio ham. In the second year he was encouraged to take summer work experience at the Ministry of Defence's Royal Radar Establishment at Malvern, Worcestershire. While companions were drafted into secret work plotting electrostatic fields around missiles, Fay was banished to the library to read up on "something to do with radio transmission", a task he now refers to as "a miserable experience".

For solace the suburban kid got back to nature. "I used to walk up the hills and remember regularly stopping at a pig farm—watching them and taking in their simplicity." Later in that summer of 1964 he shared a cottage with some friends and bought a harmonium, on which he began to write songs. Tapes of these songs made the following year were eventually heard by pop manager Terry Noon, who hooked the singer up with producer Peter Eden, a former manager of Donovan. At the time Eden was working with a group called The Fingers, who played on Fay's debut single, "Some Good Advice". Superficially, its menacing falling chord sequence and Fay's screwed-up nasal vocal might

qualify for the British pop-psychodelia it's been lumped in with, but it still sounds a long way from other piano-driven baroquequies like Kaleidoscope or The Left Banke. While everyone from The Beatles on down were cooing the kids to turn off their minds, relax and float downstream, Fay resisted the zeitgeist, telling his listeners to set their houses in order. "If you want/To build a shed/Go ahead/And build a shed." While the B side "Screams In The Ears" evokes the banality of London's swinging 'social whirl: 'Will you stop asking me I am I?/Go and find somebody else/To tell your jokes to/What a great party this is."

Terry Noon formed some of Fay's songs out to various shortlived, Peter Eden-produced English freebeat outfits, including Honeybus, Sadler's Expression and The Crocheted Doughnut Ring. In 1969 he scored a contract with Nova, a new sublabel of Decca. The 25 songs on *From The Bottom Of An Old Grandfather Clock*, dating from the interval between 1966-70, reveal the pop aspect of Fay's earliest demos, out with the members of Honeybus, as well as a few songs with him alone at his piano or keyboard. Aside from "Maudy Lull Lull", a rather ditty, moonstruck ode to a "waitress at the Hotel Unreal", with whom he finds himself bewitched and "so in love it's making me ill", there are no love songs. Instead there are vignettes, impressionistic fables populated by characters from an England still in the throes of the post-war era, variously soldiering on, living their lives within small bounds but with dreams, memories and private griefs that connect them with a world of feeling outside practical realities.

Mundane exterior can shelter deeper hurts, stranger inklings. Old May lost her boy in the Great War, but could still belt out sentimental tunes down the boozers, the ones we know so well. Stan, "an innocent soul in a vastly changing world", as Fay puts it, scattering home from the allotment at night with only a wretched can to protect himself from being abducted to Mars, "or was it Jupiter?" And Gentle Willie, who went to war, deserted, built a tower to protect himself and found himself with a ringside seat at even more carnage. "I was rooted and grounded in that older, innocent generation, like the Mays and the Stans," Fay observes.

"Uncomplicated people... there are innocent people in the world. I did have an Aunt May who sang songs, she didn't sing them in a pub, and they looked after their brother who was wounded in the First World War. They were very ordinary, simple, unpretentious people, on my mind a lot of the time. Maybe I think I can go down to earth person, but at the same time, I can go deeper and you read all sorts of things." These were England's demagog who didn't get to share in the dawning of the age of Aquarius, as their children did.

"My dad was a fire watchman," remembers Fay, "and my mum had to bundle us under the table as small children because the doodlebugs were coming over. So as kids you would know that that generation had lived through that. We were the last people in our street to get a telly, but I tend to feel that the 60s generation, as we grew up, once television came into the picture and the news started, I think all of our eyes became opened a bit more to things that had gone on in the past. The poster of Lord Kitchener saying 'Your country needs you'. Nowadays you'd turn round and say, well, what night have you got to say that? You'd see a picture of a mushroom cloud on the telly, and you'd know Hiroshima happened, and you knew all those other things are still happening. Like the Vietnam War, they're all prompting you to deal with it, and to make your mind up, and have a view on it."

Although "Parasite Child", which appeared for the



first time on the *Grandfather Clock* compilation, is told from a junky's viewpoint, and therefore not strictly autobiographical, it gives a flavour of the plight of mid-60s misunderstood youth: 'The world seems solid/It's stopped turning, it's stopped learning/Your Uncle Sid said, 'He moves like the whole world is after him/He's a chewing gum kid/Got a head like a sieve'/An'n't it easy surrounding me/It seems to me I just can't be what you want me to be.'

For his first album, Decca apparently wanted something grander than the pop combo format, perhaps imagining a success along the lines of the Beatles' Spector-produced Let It Be, or the pop orchestrations of Scott Walker, Neil Young or Jack Nitzsche. Jazz bandleader Mike Gibbs was hired to plant a knot garden of elaborate orchestral jazz curlicues around Fay's gravel pathways. Fay claims he wasn't convinced by the arrangements at first, but with only one day allocated for recording, there wasn't much room for argument. Gibbs stayed up all night writing the charts and Fay never got to hear them until the tapes began to roll.

"I thought I'd entered the wrong studio at first," he says now. "There were about 30 musicians assembled and a nervous Mike in the middle of them." The musicians, including future Brit stars such as John Surman and John Marshall, Trevor Taylor on drums, and a small string section, were drawn from the players on Gibbs's self-titled Decca LP from 1969. "I did say, 'That's flooded, Mike, that's too much. It's not how I thought it to be.' But then the next day when it was mixing day, I heard it back and I thought, it's interesting, such a lot going on there."

Sitting close to Fay's piano was Ray Russell, a prolific session guitarist who was in the orchestra for West End flower power musical Hair and unleashed searing free guitar in an early fusion unit called Rock Workshop. Sensing Fay was overwhelmed with the heady accompaniment, Russell bolstered his confidence with encouraging words, which led to their becoming close friends.

As well as the thumbnail portraits of characters, another mode of writing was beginning to appear. It had begun with the lines of "Garden Song": "I'm planting myself in the garden/Believe me/Between the potatoes and parsley/Believe me." Tree-hugging hippy twiddle on paper, perhaps, but Fay believed the lines were pure purpose – he couldn't sound less stoned. "I'm looking for lasting relations/With the spider, the greenfly, or maggot/They're telling me something I don't know." The song has the quality of revere and awakening at the same moment. Fay breaks it down: "I'm planting", trying to place myself in a true, not shadowy reality, to wake up to something not just going on around in the world, but a deeper reality. But the starting point would be the natural world – the trees, living things."

Bill Fay wasn't good enough to be a hit with the Lux generation. He augmented a pittance income from music by pecking fish in Selfridges and "hooning the bees, edging, mowing" in a London park.

By 1970 Fay's circle of musician friends included Ray Russell, drummer Alan Rushton and Honeybus's Peter Dello. They were reading widely in philosophy and theosophy, sucked into "heaven conversations" lasting deep into the night. Dello turned Fay on to the writings of Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955), a French Jesuit, paleoecologist and philosopher. The first to coin the word "Gaia" in relation to a notion of the "Whole Earth", a unified organism whose systems and

ecologies were crucially interconnected, De Chardin integrated enlightened Christianity with atomic physics, proposing that civilisation was approaching an "omega point" – the dawn of a new age of altered global consciousness.

"He was just one of many," says Fay, "but he was so optimistic and positive, and that definitely rubbed off. His thing was that life was that important and that it's only on the planet that life is reaching these kind of heights. The vastness of the universe and stars and all that, to him they were basically [only] hydrogen. I think it helped me in the sense that I'd saw a butterfly flying by or something, I could actually feel the strangeness of that... I'd compare the blackness of outer space with this kind of... thing, flying about, and the complexity of it, and you think, blimey."

"I remember Ray Russell used to write poetry a bit," he continues, "and one couplet I really do remember, that sticks with me, which I think sums that side of things up: 'I opened my eyes wide, and the world flew inside.' You felt like you could find something out and you could get in touch with the real outside world as opposed to day-to-day... It was as if you could, but yeah, everything was very seeking orientated."

"The influence was just searching," recalls Ray Russell, "[we were] interested in philosophy, unrest, just frustrations at various things, and it led to a lot of conversations which, you know, built Bill's songs."

"Christ is in the bathroom/Look in any mirror on the wall/And Satan's in the garden shed/He'd like to screw you all"

"Release Is In The Eye", *Time Of The Last Persecution*

If Bill Fay was his songs of innocence, *Time Of The Last Persecution* collected songs of experience. Instead of the Gibbs orchestra, Fay attended the day-long session with a small group comprising Russell on guitar and production, Alan Rushton and jazz bassist Daryl Runswick – the last two encountering the songs for the first time. They are of a very different character to the rainbow music of the previous year. The album opens with "Omega Day", its title betraying De Chardin's influence: "My dreaming robe is broken/I cannot stay awake/Better fix it soon no joking/For the orange day has come." Fay explains the significance of those lines: "I think [my perception] had been... especially heightened, and then you get the fall. A lot of the songs are on a theme of being awake to something but then kind of falling asleep to something. In a simple way, if one day you see the butterfly, or a bee buzzing by, or a tree, you compare it with the nothingness, say, or the blackness of outer space, or the simplicity, and you can really feel that strangeness. A couple of days later you're going to be so within yourself for whatever reason, that you're not going to stay on that level, and you're going to lose it."

The album's recurring motif is a warning against false leaders, messiahs and prophets. Fay's breath is thick with imminent crisis. "Well now soon Plan D/Will be released and the sea shall rise/And the skies open" ("Plan D"). "Pictures Of Adolf Agran" cautions against the threat of Hitler, Bartholomew J Vorster (architect of South Africa's apartheid regime), Christ and "all the Caesars to come"; another song is called "Till The Christ Come Back."

"I think it was apocalyptic," says Russell, "I think we were all waiting for the sky to open a bit. But, funny enough, you know how these feelings kind of bring you through things, and it's interesting that people now find it very relevant to the situation again."

Fay is at pains to correct the impression that the

album documented some kind of personal apocalypse. "It was the problems of the world that I was talking about, not my own problems," he insists. "The world was going through heavy times – our view of the world was a heavy world." The dirgelike title song claims, "It is the time of the Anti-Christ know what I say/Make for your own secret place." "That song," he says, "was written immediately after the tanks rolling into the campus and killing students in America [at Kent State University, Ohio in May 1970]. 'Do not avenge these deaths, do not avenge them. Make for your own secret place' – and don't get caught up in overthrowing things and all that. To me that wasn't the way to go. I was trying to say that you're entitled to come away from seeing not police clubbing people, look at other things in the world as well, and not to get consumed and overcome by it."

The cover photo inflamed rumours of the singer's disintegration; in fact it was taken in the studio while Fay's concentration was elsewhere. "The dishevelled look," chuckles Russell, "I think we all looked like that. I think I had a few beads on. It's an anti-image, really. You have to realise, people did think we were kind of from Mars. At the time with Decca, you had to go through a music contractor who has to officially book you for the session. I think it was a guy called Charlie Katz. He had to walk in and make sure we were there – one of those silly formalities. I remember him sheepishly approaching us, saying, 'Who are you?' And we sort of stood there looking pretty. I don't know, outrageous, and he just sort of backed out. And we said, 'Well, we're here, what's the question?' And he looked at us, got really nervous and reversed out. It was very funny. We had a few instances in the studio where they couldn't cope with us, we cleared the room a couple of times."

Far from disappearing into a mental black hole, Fay simply went back to the day jobs, but continued to write and record demos with Russell and Rushton for several years. He was caught in an industry catch-22: without a single, there would be no finance for an album, and yet no company would stump up for a single without an album to promote. So Fay drifted, playing odd gigs here and there. "Bill had a very interesting following," remembers Russell. "A few people came down that were kind of religious, in a way – a lot of people wanted to see what he was about. He was quite a phenomenon, really."

And then in the mid-70s he picked up on the same bill as The Acme Quartet, a group of young South Londoners playing a frenned instrumental jazz rock. Their guitarist Gary Smith was particularly influenced by Ray Russell's electric jazz projects, and all of them were fans of Bill Fay. They hit it off with the singer in the dressing room and by the end of the night they had agreed to become Fay's backing group.

"We went round each other's houses or had a drink down the road," says Smith, recalling the routine of those days. "It had to be social, it wasn't just a matter of getting together and going away. The sort of music you're dealing with, and the circumstances, it was crucial that it was more than music. To put it bluntly, the group I was playing with was 100 per cent uncompromising, I can't stress that enough! I was developing a really intense artistic style. What we intended to do was graft The Acme Quartet onto the Bill Fay Group songs, which I have to say would have been already sectional. But on meeting Bill, he had moved on a bit and he was doing songs that were a bit lighter. He could write a song about a shoe and it would still be a Bill Fay song."

Fay's songs retained the Christian imagery of several years before, but woven into illuminated panels reminiscent of medieval courtly poetry: a lyrical landscape heaving with snails, squirrels and cuckoos, a visionary demesne where "the Prince of Darkness no more is the lord of forest"; "Then shall the reynard, the leonic lords, lay at the feet of the swan." Smith, Rauf Gulp (bass) and Bill Stratton (drums) worked on song arrangements, rehearsing in Smith's front room. With titles like "Strange Starway," "Sentinel Mansions" and "Cosmic Boxer," they are beautiful, altruistic hymns, glowing and emblematic, unsentimental equivalents of Lennon's "Imagine," with all the harmonic inequity of Fay's previous LPs. His songs express the perpetual desire to grapple with the Satan in the closet and to fight against complacency, to attain some height over the world's distractions and horrors.

"I value so much how much they put into it," says Fay. "They enabled me to stick to those kind of songs and work on them instead of me sidetracking into other simpler areas. All sorts of things pop out, but the great service they did was keep me on a track that was more connected to the first two albums—sticking with the profound."

By 1981 they had amassed an LP's worth of material. "I don't think we were that optimistic," says Smith, "but we did send stuff to record companies, so it wasn't like we weren't interested—just that the record industry wasn't interested. We got some pretty insulting responses. Not a particularly productive period for music, but that's the way it is." Smith and Fay continued playing and recording during the 80s but their collaboration petered out in the following decade. But when Durtro's David Michael made contact in 2003, he was allowed access to the masters, which are released this month as *Tomorrow Tomorrow And Tomorrow*.

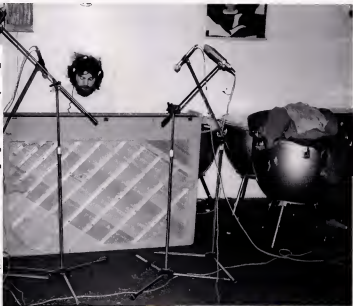
"After all these years I emerge from the darkness, / All eyes and ears / Awake and breathing / I dwell in the / Rules of sleep / Blarshed as a shadow / Where no light could reach / No teacher's arrows" "Isles Of Sleep," *Tomorrow Tomorrow And Tomorrow*

Not long before this interview, Fay met up with the original Acme Quartet. He has been recording with Smith again and it seems likely that a new collection of songs will appear in the future. He writes and records at home on a keyboard and digital multitrack recorder. "I've continued to write songs still with those kind of themes, yeah, and other songs that are more than just songs. They're still meaningful songs, so it's broad, but there's always the recurrence of the same theme. That's a deep part of me now, so there'll always be songs that emerge on a par with that."

"It surprises and astounds me, the beautiful melodies that come. And that's why I say, me as a listener, I'm so pleased to have those songs come into my own life, if that makes sense. The kind of melodies that I'm discovering these days, they're beautiful, and maybe further down the line they'll get recorded and others will get to hear them. But at the moment I'm just grateful to receive these melodies."

Perhaps there is still an omega day to come for Bill Fay, although when it arrives, it will not be in a blaze of light. The last word goes to Ray Russell: "He doesn't think he's Jesus, you know. He doesn't think he's a prophet. He just writes songs with conviction, and he's on about something which is great." □ *Tomorrow Tomorrow And Tomorrow* is out now on Durtro Jnane.

Bill Fay and Time Of The Last Persecution are released this month on Eclectic Discs. Thanks to Phil Smees



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: BILL FAY, LATE 70S; FAY IN 2005 (RIGHT) WITH DURTRO'S DAVID MICHAEL; ACME QUARTET'S GARY SMITH







# BIG BOSS MAN

WHEN HE'S NOT LEADING JAPAN'S LONGEST RUNNING AND MOST NOTORIOUS ALL-VOMITING NOISE UNIT *HUJIKAI*, WHO THIS YEAR CELEBRATE THEIR 25TH ANNIVERSARY, *JOJO* HIROSHIGE MASTERMINDS A WEST JAPANESE CHALLENGE TO TOKYO'S MEDIA DOMINANCE FROM HIS OSAKA BASED LABEL AND SHOP, *ALCHEMY*. WORDS: ALAN CUMMINGS. PHOTOS: JUN TAKAGI

"What is noise?" asks Jojo Hiroshige, self-crowned King of Noise and Hiroshige's motor force. "What is music? What is performance? Or sound pressure? Or power? Energy? Spirituality? Freedom? The inexpressible cannot be turned into words. But it can be turned into noise."

In the past Hiroshige has steadfastly refused to attach meaning to Hōkaiden's activities, allowing their often overwhelmingly physical performances to speak for themselves. In the early 1980s they gained notoriety through the Dionysian extremity of their shows, involving destruction of instruments, tossing around buckets of festering fishbones, vomiting, onstage urination and, of course, an excruciatingly loud, pulverizing racket. "We just wanted to be a weird lump of sound and action," describes Hiroshige. Miraculously, last year Hōkaiden – the name means Emergency Staircase – celebrated their 25th anniversary with a retrospective CD, *Lord Of The Noise*, on the Japanese major Teichiku, with an accompanying DVD of four live excerpts that features two of their most uncompromising early performances.

In Hiroshige's telling, the genre of pure noise began when he formed Hōkaiden in Kyoto in 1979 – the same year that Masami Akita launched the more widely acclaimed Merzbow in Tokyo. With a hint of pride, Hiroshige estimates noise's accelerated development has since given birth to at least four more

"generations." As founder of Akcherry, one of Japan's longest running and most curiously independent record labels, alongside Tokyo's PSF, he has acted as mentor and cheerleader to many younger noise artists like Boredoms' Yamataka Eye, Massarna and Aube, as well as a wealth of punk, metal and post-rock groups. In addition, his Akcherry Music Store (not to be confused for strange people) in Osaka acts as a networking locus for underground heads from across Kansai, the area of western Japan containing Osaka, Kyoto and Kobe, which is frequently seen as a cultural counterweight to Tokyo. Finally, as a regular commentator on underground and alternative music in the Japanese music press, Hiroshige is an articulate and visible emblem of resistance to the pressures of mainstream Japanese society, a model of how to build a viable alternative in its shadows. His air of genial, well-adjusted respectability, which all but disappears on stage, has led friends to address him, only half-jokingly, as "Shacho," the boss. Hiroshige wears other, stranger hats too – watching TV one night in Tokyo, I happened to see him appear straight-faced on the local equivalent of Antiques Roadshow, appraising the value of vintage baseball trading cards. The incongruity amuses him now, but his younger self was not so forgiving. "When I left university I didn't want to work," he recalls. "I couldn't deal with the contradiction of working in a company all day, then be at a gig screaming about noise, throwing up and smashing stuff... I didn't want to be part of normal society, wearing a tie, flattering clients. But now," he laughs, "I find myself doing all those things."

Onstage violence and self-mutilation may be enough to create notorious rock legends like GG Allin, but it's no guarantee of musical interest. If the performance art aspect of early Hōkaiden obscured the intent of the music, for the past 20 years the sound itself has become the group's focus. Gone are the destructive onstage pinnacles, to be replaced by a sometimes frighteningly focused sense of energy and emotional projection. Hōkaiden's sheer density of volume remains one of their trademarks, and they invariably

favour the piercing high end above the low.

Instrumentally, the current lineup includes guitarists Hiroshige and Fumio Kosaki, wordless vocals Junko, drummer Nao Shibata from female psych duo Doodles, and the fearsome electronics of T. Miwaka. The elements in themselves are markedly uncompromising – Junko's vocals are for the most part sustained, high pitch screams, the guitars scythe and buzz with distortion and feedback, over heavily struck, anarchy drums. Unlike Merzbow, Hōkaiden are primarily a live unit, accelerating the physicality and dynamics of rock into a constant blur of motion. At first the brain scrambles to make sense of this overwhelming rush of motion and information. But such is its complexity that memory cannot document it all quickly enough, and the only response is to surrender to the sound as a sensory experience. For the performers too, emotional catharsis has always been a key objective. "When I play live, I'm not venting anger but neither am I providing entertainment," says Hiroshige. "I realise this sounds pretentious but I feel that I am getting rid of whatever is inside me. I feel like I am transferring what is inside me to the guitar, to the totality of the sound. As I play, there are moments when I become totally empty inside, like a blank space."

"The 'chaotic' destructive power of their 'act' has often been pointed out," observed Merzbow's Akita in the sleeve notes to the 1990 Hōkaiden album *Romance*. "But rather than the scandalous nature of their actions, we need to discuss Hōkaiden's musical methodology, the way they intertwine noise and the flesh of the performers into a world of convulsive couplings." Hōkaiden are indeed the sound, not just of man and machine interacting, but of flesh, snarl and multiple human desires colliding in a single space.

Hiroshige himself sees noise as an extremely flexible musical tool, capable of expressing the linguistically inexpressible. "Words are different from sounds in that the images they create are limited," he says. "They're like a two-sided coin – sometimes they can be used effectively, but sometimes they restrict the range of the images employed. When I was 17 or 18 I read Wittgenstein's philosophical investigations and that led me to start thinking about the importance of pinning down thought through the medium of language. Escaping into sound because of your own meticulousity with language, and using sound to express what cannot be expressed in words are two sides of the same equation. And they are also the main dilemma presented by noise. But I believe that in Hōkaiden we have managed to accomplish something that could not be accomplished through words."

Hōkaiden are the ultimate example of one side of the equation, operating in an area where language cannot exist. Elsewhere, in his solo albums and side projects, Hiroshige successfully reconciled language, music and noise in song.

Initially, however, words held sway. Born in 1959 in Kyoto, Hiroshige's first creative acts were the lengthy novels he tried to write at school, joining the school's writing, drama and debating clubs. Debate there may have been, but his was a generation that knew nothing of the hardships of Japan's immediate post-war years; it had also missed out on the radical, anti-war and anti-American student protests of the 1960s and early 70s. Any unity between word and action had been effectively severed through the dissolution of the protest movement. The Japanese, it appeared, were becoming ever more acquiescent. By the time Hiroshige's generation reached their teens the consumer society

was in full flow, its comfortable rewards tempering any anger against the bribery scandals that revealed the corrupt Faustian bargains between Japan's politicians and big business.

Hiroshige's first exposure to popular music came through an elder sister's record collection, but he remembers being bored by most of it apart from the concept album *Human Renaissance* (sic) by The Tigers, who belonged to the Group Sounds movement. 1960s Japan's response to Merseybeat. "Up till then, Japanese songs had almost all been about the love between men and women, and when you're ten years old that doesn't interest you in the slightest," he recalls. "But *Human Renaissance* was a conceptual development of the world of the Old Testament, and for a devoted ten year old reader of Bible stories, that was pretty interesting. I realised that there were groups who expressed stories and philosophy through their music." In his early teens, the political upstart duo Zuno Keisatsu struck another deeply resonant chord, with songs like "Declaration Of Worldwide Revolutionary War" and "Grab A Gun".

A year before he went to university, Hiroshige started hanging out at a Kyoto coffee shop-cum-live space called Ongrature, which specialised in Progressive rock. "It was a strange space," recalls Hiroshige. "The floors and walls were covered with purple carpet and you took your shoes off at the entrance. The floor had spotlights with engraved glass covers set into it and this indirect lighting was designed to create a dreamlike interior." At Ongrature, Hiroshige hit it off with a fellow student called Bate, a fan of Faust and Arno Düll, and in 1978 they started a synth and bass duo, which evolved into the semi-improvised No Wave group Ultrabide. Hiroshige remembers the time as intensely productive musically. "I've been going through our old tapes," he says, "and our sound was a mix of driving punk, Prog rock and free jazz, plus that malicious lightness of Wild Man Fischer, and over that year we brought in noise elements, reggae elements. It was an immensely valuable time for me, in terms of thinking about performance."

They were not alone. The same year, a clutch of similarly motivated groups appeared around Kyoto and Osaka – the most prominent being Phew's Aint Sully, SS & Inu. The Kansai No Wave scene lasted for just over a year before imploding. Ultrabide stumbled on until early 1980, but by July 1979 Hiroshige had already started Hōkaiden with guitarist Naoki Zushi. Overlaid to playing the strangest and most extreme music imaginable to teenage minds, Hōkaiden realised their aim through decorating volume and improvisation. With its Faust parody cover artwork, Hōkaiden's 1986 compilation album *Tapes* provides a primitively recorded small sample of how the short-lived duo sounded. The frenzy of mangled guitars obliterating the tinny rhythm of a homemade drum machine and Hiroshige's unintelligible squawked vocals pointed to the group's future development.

Hiroshige had long been interested in the highest moments of tension during rock performances. "I wanted to spin out the high tension instants of rock music for far longer," he elaborates. "When you went to see rock bands in the 70s, Deep Purple or The Scorpions or whoever, when the songs reached their peak there would be a moment where the music would pass beyond melodies and phrases into this intense, noisy sound. I wanted to have a band that would just play like that from beginning to end. I thought that would be the ultimate form of rock. I used to tape just those moments from hard rock



records, join them together and play them at maximum volume on my stereo."

Though he was certain that he had hit the nail on the head, he was fascinated to make another discovery. "While we were playing," he continues, "I soon realized that there was more to it than simply creating extreme sounds. The improvised performance of noise gives a vivid portrayal of the performer's strength as a human being—I call this human-power. Noise isn't about technique, we don't compose anything so it's not about the song you've chosen or the way you play it. It all comes down to how much of your inner self you can bring to the performance. Noise created by a shallow person always tends to be shallow. Every music has a limit to its expressivity, but I believe that noise pushes those limits just slightly further."

Enraptured by this discovery, Hiroshige gathered together another group of intimates from among the Dragstore clientele, and performed as Fushoku No Maki (Rotting Mary) for a couple of gigs before reverting to Hyokaidan. With a lineup including two those interested in making music (including T Mikawa on electronics, Mutsaiki 'Mako' Jusug on vocals and Koichiro Kani on sax), and those with a more performance art direction (Toshiyuki 'Oka' Oka, Katsuhiko Zuke, Mitsuhiro, Hiroko 'Semimaru' Onishi on violence, vomiting and urination respectively), the group's reputation for violent onstage anarchy and pseudo-sadism grew apace. "Oka and Zuke decided to convey physical repulsiveness through ever possible sensory medium, to add to the direct violence they had already manifested," recalls Mikawa, who had the good old days. "To this end, before the show they mixed garlic, raw fish and sushi-like with buckets of putrid water. During the performance they started throwing these buckets around the stage. As it happened, I had not been forewarned about their plans and I was struck dumb with amazement. This show also marked the first time that Semimaru urinated on stage—a routine that at one time became almost synonymous with us. By the end of our performance, the entire venue stank so badly that it took over a week for the stench to fully dissipate. The next day we denied all knowledge of what we had taken place."

Today, Hiroshige denies that there was anything of the 1960s art happening or any latent sadistic impulse behind these performances. Rather, he explains, they were part of the group's philosophy to exploit the stage as a space of absolute freedom. "We started by wondering what the free of free music meant," he says. "Did it mean the freedom to perform anything? But the free in free jazz seemed to have a form that the musicians play with, so that didn't interest me. So if you do something really free, it will just be something close to chaos. Playing an instrument isn't being free, because instruments are designed for playing music on. DK, so next we thought of just getting up on stage with the intention to do something, regardless of whether we could play an instrument or not. We wanted to create a space where people who wanted to could just get up on stage. If you couldn't play an instrument, you could just stand there. Or you could go crazy. The main thing was to do whatever interested you the most. And of course, that meant that some people wanted to do something that would piss off everyone else."

"We all loved horror films," he continues, "and there was a sense that the performers wanted to become zombies. When normal people got up on stage they

want to act cool, like rock stars. But for us, that was uncool. What we wanted to do was act like zombies, for us that was cool."

For all the talk of extremity in sound and action, Hyokaidan have always refused to exploit the extreme bondage and atrocity imagery that often marks noise releases worldwide. This may have to do with the virtual non-existence of a body of conservative public opinion to outrage in Japan—Alchemy groups like Auschwitz (misguidedly named as a tribute to the death camp's orchestra) or the Genkaku Onnies (meaning The Atom Bomb Musicians) failed to raise a single complaint. But as a policy, Hiroshige has little truck with shallow shock tactics. "If course there's no need to hide someone away because they're insane or deformed," he explains, "but to take just the most extreme elements and sell them to people just because they are weird, or shocking or repellent, I think that is humanity at its basest. As are the people who buy and look at those images for their shock value." Apart from the Hideshi Hiro cartoon of a rotting hermit on the cover of 1981's *Zoroku No Kibyō* (Zoroku's Strange Disease), Hyokaidan have steadfastly avoided such imagery. Instead, they've gone for plastically bucolic images, such as the 1991 album *Widom's* saasids holiday snap, or private joke parodies of Prag covers, such as 1989's *Midem*, whose black and white cover duplicates Peter Hammett's *Nasty's* Big Chance, with a goofy image shot from Hiroshige and Junko's wedding. "Hyokaidan's music has no meaning," Hiroshige explains. "Since it has no meaning, there is no point in creating sleeve art that suggests meaning. This is a very important point for us. If there was a meaning, that would limit the images that listeners take from the sound, but with no meaning they are free to interpret the sounds according to their own imaginations and sensibilities."

Noise might not have meaning, but he acknowledges that it readily carries emotional content, even likening it to the overbearing melancholy of enka, a song style sometimes described as Japan's Country & Western. "Since noise is essentially a mixture of everything, of course heartrending pain is there too," he says.

"I really believe that noise carries a energy very like that of enka. On a fundamental level, noise isn't that different to Shinichi Mori or Akira Kobayashi," he declares, citing two of enka's most lachrymose male voices.

Word about Hyokaidan's extreme performance soon spread to Tokyo, and the group were invited to play a couple of high profile events in 1981. By now moved to the performance faction's high jinks, the more musically inclined members took to shielding their clothing and instruments with overcoats and bin bags. If audiences continued to expect a freak show, the performers themselves were growing tired of it. Well, there's a limit to the number of times you can eat earthworms on stage with relish. "There's nothing impressive per se in smashing up your guitar on stage or violent action," sighs Hiroshige. "The meaning is in the process leading up to those actions. Hyokaidan have never really intended to play music or put on a performance. It's neither music, nor art." There is a sense too that Hiroshige was beginning to chafe against the easy pigeonholing that such performances brought them. "If you keep on doing that," he continues, "eventually audiences are going to start to enjoy it. The performers knew the group was supposed to be a continuing project, but for them

doing an action just once was enough. We saw no point in endlessly appearing on stage saying 'Hi, we're Hyokaidan, now a girl will piss on the stage'. But even now audiences still expect that kind of thing from us, and those expectations are very disappointing." Soon enough the performance-orientated members drifted away, leaving just the musical hardcore.

It was at this time, in 1984, that Hiroshige started a label with his friend, the late Auschwitz vocalist Naoto Hayashi, who, attracted by the idea of transforming other people's valueless trash into something of musical value, suggested the name Alchemy Records. Hayashi's A&R philosophy still provides a model for the label's releases. "It comes down to whether they're interesting or not," he stated, "that they don't lie in their music. And that they're in for the long haul. We don't want them to quit. Our main criteria is whether we'll still want to listen to their songs and performances years down the line." Based in Osaka, Alchemy has never been just a straight noise label, although through the Good Alchemy series it has documented great swathes of the stuff by Hyokaidan, Incapacitants, Massons, Solimano, Aube, Merzbau, and Yamataka Eye's pre-Boredoms noise group Hanatarashi. Although Hiroshige himself has been resident in Tokyo for most of the past 20 years, the label has focused primarily on groups from Kansai, who would be otherwise cut off from the oxygen of Tokyo's media publicity. The Alchemy roster reads like a penthouse of Hiroshige's personal obsessions, with releases by Kansai punk veterans like SS, INU and The Genkaku Onnies, pop punk from Sekin, straighter rock from Auschwitz, Garlic Boys and Subvert Blaze, unclassifiable Boredoms of Shouts Omote Hatsaba and Hanadensha, and even some releases by US sax noise crew Bortobomagus and veteran Canadians The Nihilist Spasm Band. More recently, Alchemy's Night Gallery compiles have refocused attention on a young crop of provincial psychedelic groups such as LSD March and Uptight.

At the same time Alchemy was taking its first fattening steps, the lineup of Hyokaidan had gradually solidified into the trio of Hiroshige, Mikawa and vocalist Junko. Towards the end of the 1980s they played out in a line-up that included Fumio Kosaka, Mikawa's partner for many of his noise noise events, wrestling unit Incapacitants, on second guitar, and Merzbau as occasional guest drummer. More recently, the presence of Doodles drummer Nor Shibata on Hyokaidan's latest release, *The Last Recording Album* (the title a little Fate reference rather than an announcement of imminent demise), has given the group a whole new surge of energy. "Whenever I saw Doodles play I was always struck by Nao's many talents," remarks Hiroshige, as if he were hearing a Jack Black School of Noise. "I thought that if she were to play with Hyokaidan she could enjoy herself and it would also be good for her technical skills and her musical sensitivity. That's why I asked her to join, and I think that it's worked out well. Hyokaidan have been rejuvenated by her presence and become an even more powerful noise band."

With Hyokaidan finally reaching stability in the 1990s, Hiroshige began to cast around for new challenges, like Slapp Happy Humphrey. The bizarre name, melding together European Proglers Slapp Happy with little known 35D into pro-wrestler Slapp Humphrey, grew out of a typically goofy Alchemy compulsion that pinned on the names of Japanese baseball teams to create such monstrosities as *Kintetsu Buffalo Springfield* (after the

Kintetsu Buffalos) and Seibu Lion-el Richie (the Seibu Lions). Also featuring vocalist Mineko Itakura (from Osaka girl psych group *Angel* in Heavy Syrup) and Hiroaki Fujiwara on acoustic guitar. Sleep Happy Humphrey went on to record an album of covers by one of Hiroshige's favourite 1970s female singer-songwriters, Doji Morita, who disappeared from public life in 1982. "She was a singer who sang the pain of human existence itself, and she had a great impact on me as a teenager," says Hiroshige. "The only singers at the time who sang about suicide or wanting to die were Doji Morita, Kan Mikami and Kazuo Tomokawa." Hiroshige's SHH arrangements added hefty yet effectively controlled doses of guitar noise to the crystalline structures of Morita's songs. The surprisingly effective results gave credence to Hiroshige's notion that words and noise could be usefully fused together. However, Morita and her lawyers were not so impressed, and a second edition is now highly unlikely.

Morita was not the only 1970s singer-songwriter to intoxicate the young Hiroshige. There was also Yoshiko Sai, who left behind four albums of exotic, fragile moods before retiring in 1978. "I first heard her songs in 1976 and they affected me hugely," he remembers. "On her second album *Mikko* I discerned the absolute depths of music and song – I still believe that today. She stopped performing in 1978, just around the same time as I started playing live.

Yoshiko Sai's music awoke something in me, and I believe that I took over the baton from her, in terms of searching for the future direction of music."

Fortunately, Sai was more open to Hiroshige's overtures, and in 2001 she recorded an album with him called *Onion Voyage*. Again, it's a combination of gorgeous floating vocals and noise guitar, though here Hiroshige tempers his usual fury with a more contemplative drone edge. Alchemy has also issued an album of unreleased tracks by Sai, and she has contributed some lyrics and scat vocals to Hiroshige's solo albums.

Since 1998, Hiroshige has released seven solo albums, many of them with death-fixated titles such as *If You're Able To Tell Me To Die*, *I Will* (*Kimigae Shinu To Ieba Shinu Kara*), *I Wish Everyone Would Die* (*Minna Shinde Shimaeba I Na Ni*), *No Reason To Live* (*Kite Iru Kachi Nashi*). The records aim for a perfect balance of song and noise, with harshly barbed vocals over freeform feedback guitar, though in places they reveal Hiroshige's surprisingly sensitive grasp of melody. Ever the paternalist elder statesman of his extended rock noise community, Hiroshige sees the albums as fulfilling a social role, in warning the suicide-prone youth of Japan (recent media reports have concentrated on a craze for internet hook-up group suicides) away from death. "People commit suicide because they want to escape this world, right?" diagnoses Hiroshige. "But they only think they can escape because of a lack of imagination. In this world, there is one thing that exceeds the imagination, and that is death itself. We cannot imagine what death is like, so there is absolutely no point in trying to run away from it... But no one will tell them that. Not magazines, not newspapers, not schoolteachers. We need someone to say that death is no way of escaping anything. It needs to be said clearly: There's no escape." □ The Last Recording Album Is on Alchemy; the retrospective *Shin Zetsuen Densetsu: Lord Of The Noise*, the Alchemy compilation *Alchemyism* and the 2xCD Hiroshige set *Kite Iru Kachi Nado Aru Ja Nashi*, 1975-2005 are out on Teichiku

THE FILTH AND THE FURY  
HUCKADAM LIVE AT SHINJUKU LOFT,  
TOKYO, 1981



# ALL SHOW UP



JAMES TENNEY IS AN EXPERIMENTALIST WHO EMBRACES TRADITION, AN ELECTRONIC MUSIC PIONEER WHO HASN'T PRODUCED AN ELECTRONIC WORK SINCE 1989, A PROLIFIC COMPOSER WHO REFUSES TO BE COMPROMISED BY ORCHESTRAL ORTHODOXIES, A CONDUCTOR, PIANIST AND ARTIST WHO HAS SPENT THE PAST FOUR DECADES MANAGING TO FIT NOWHERE WHILE FINDING HIMSELF EVERYWHERE. WORDS: PHILIP CLARK  
PHOTOS: ROBERT GALLAGHER



Explaining how James Tenney squares up against the core activities of John Cage, Morton Feldman and Earle Brown, British composer Mark R. Taylor once wisecracked that Tenney was "The New York School's fifth Beethoven". But ever since he researched the latest advances in computer music at New Jersey's Bell Labs by day and flirted with the gloriously unscientific world of Fluxus by night, Tenney has been apart from the accepted 20th century avant-garde canon, which has helped his music keep an exciting edge. One of his main spheres of exploration has been with alternative tuning systems, but he's determinedly non-judgmental about standard equal temperament, and must be the only experimental composer around who's written a set of piano ragtimes. As we talk, Tenney—who was 70 last year—is amused by his assumption that in our postmodern age he's barely talking ironic ragtime. "No! We often talk about modern composers as being iconoclastic. I'm not that," he rebuts, "if anything I'd have to be called an 'iconophile'. I don't do things that are provocations against great music—in fact, you'll notice many of my works are dedicated to, or reference another composer's name in the title. I don't have what Harold Bloom called 'the anxiety of influence'. I want to celebrate my influences because I belong to a line that comes through my teachers and the composers who inspired me."

The basis of Tenney's music has been formulated from his research into the fabric of sound itself, so much so that he's often referred to as a "composer and theorist", a label that he embraces. "It's like eating and sleeping," he reveals, "they're two different things that all conscious people must do. Much of the time I've explored was motivated by my desire to understand contemporary music better and to give me a framework for composition. The most important aspect of what I've done is coming to some understanding of how we hear, what you might call 'the perceptual process'. As composers, we're putting out sounds that are received by the human auditory system and sound has got special properties that are unlike, say, the visual system, and it's important to understand that."

An experimental composer fails when the purpose is merely to replicate the surface of earlier experiments, but by unashamedly celebrating the infidelity of the experimental tradition, Tenney exposes the faultline in composers who turn experimentalism into a style as banal as generic as neo-bop. His own view—figures like Edgar Varèse (with whom he studied) and long-time friend and confidant John Cage as relying on aspects of tradition for stimulation. "Both Cage and Varèse are part of Western tradition," he ruminates, "they have altered it and therefore became part of it. The Western tradition—if you're looking at the 20th century—changed in many more radical ways compared to music before 1900. But non-Western music has had such an influence that very soon the term Western tradition isn't going to be specific enough to identify anything."

Tenney's analysis recognises that Varèse didn't bolt from the blue as is often claimed but operated by radicalising his roots in Ferruccio Busoni and Igor Stravinsky. Even Cage wouldn't have been Cage if it wasn't for his instinctive antipathy towards Western harmonic procedures and his profound admiration for Erik Satie. Likewise, Tenney's music seeks out the radical usability of the music he admired while rejecting the transient—tradition and modernist radicalism pulling together with dynamic synergy.

As a young composer trying to find his voice in the late 1950s, Tenney stood at a crossroads between Arnold Schoenberg and Edgar Varèse. The Schoenberg pieces that interested him were those composed after the Viennese pedagogue's tonal apprenticeship but before his systematisation of atonality into tone rows and serial composition. "I never was very interested in serial organisation," he recalls. "I tried it but that kind of melodic and thematic development didn't suit me. I can be interested in it in somebody else's music as a performer or listener—Varèse's Concord Sonata is full of intriguing thematic transformations and thematic recurrences, but that's not what interests me as a composer." Tenney's ultimate rejection of serial practices was a key moment of realisation. By aligning himself to Varèse, he was linking himself to a composer whose feral sounds challenged the niceties of classical music, and whose pieces—with titles like *Density 21.5*, *Hyperprism* and *Ionisation*—presupposed an alliance with scientific research into the marrow of sound. Varèse's example of building pieces by layering melodic intervals into spectra gave Tenney his first inkling that another method of musical organisation was possible, and would ultimately lead to his explorations of alternative tunings via the harmonic series—issues that later preoccupied the so-called 'spectral' school of composers like Horatio Radulescu, Gérard Grisey and Tristan Murail.

Varèse's comments about one of Tenney's early scores was perceptive and revealing. "I remember him looking at a piece based entirely on the minor second (the smallest and most dissonant melodic interval)—just about every vertical sonority was a dissonance and there was very little else in the way of intervallic qualities," Tenney remembers. "Varèse told me that my piece was going to get kind of boring because there were no other intervals, and that from a man whose music is as highly dissonant as is possible. Then studying his pieces you realise that, although every sonority is dissonant with a minor second based interval, there are also many other intervals and these give colour and variety to the harmony. He also made a point of sounding a physical phenomenon, and that it takes time for sound to travel from one place to another, like from the player on the stage to the audience's ears. With Varèse, there was always this very palpable sense of sound as vibration."

Tenney's earliest success was his electronic Collage #1 (*Blue Suede*) from 1961, which, despite its source in the Carl Perkins song made famous by Elvis Presley, owes more to Varèse's *Palme Électronique*. He constructs an alternating musical landscape by manipulating Elvis's uh-huhs and guitar riffs. He slows the tape down, reverses it, edits until Elvis's musical syntax crumbles and incorporates odd echo effects and heavy multi-tracking, but then lets ever more recognisable Presleysisms rise to the surface. The familiar becomes heard in an entirely fresh context, and Tenney forges a link between Varèse and Elvis as untamed morales who left their respective traditions all shook up. "I was attracted to Presley by his sheer energy," says Tenney, recounting the evolution of the piece. "Contrast that with Frank Sinatra and here's someone putting real sexual energy into his performance. I'd struggled for a long time with the synthetic nature of electronic sound which didn't appeal to me, but Presley gave me something tactile to use, and once I started the piece I was able to finish it very quickly." How does Tenney

feel about *Blue Suede*'s appropriation as an early example of postmodern composition? "What people call postmodern I just see as another development within modernism—and that's when it's good work," he refutes. "Otherwise it's a phoney excuse, a sort of anti-modernism, and it's bad art trying to defend its corner by attaching a new label to itself. If *Blue Suede* is postmodern then where does that leave Charles Ives? Was Ives being postmodern at the start of the 20th century? No, I don't think so—he was a modernist."

From 1961-64 Tenney was holed up at Bell Telephone Laboratories, New Jersey, where his exploration of electronic music stepped up a gear. A Behavioural and Acoustic Research Centre had been set up within the company in 1955 by John Pierce and Max Mathews, to develop computer programs designed to simulate musical instruments and the human voice. However, even though they did produce music of their own, Pierce and Mathews were more scientists than composers and Tenney's role was to give a "composely spin" to their research. He found himself in a unique position as one of few composers at the time actively engaged in computer composition. "I was hired because they figured it'd be a good idea to bring in a composer who could come up with ideas about how their program might be developed as a practical composition tool," he recalls. "So after working with it in its original form I immediately began suggesting additions like filters, envelope generators, different ways of generating waveforms to affect timbre. Ultimately I also created an interface that allowed a composer to input data to the sound generating program so it became part of a single process. Even the noise generator was the result of my suggestion, and these were all things that were obvious to somebody who'd already worked with electronic music."

Tenney has suggested the journey he made at Bell Labs was that of a composer learning to let go. The earlier pieces he assembled during this period, *Analogue #1* (*Noise Study*) (1961), *Dialogue and Phases* (for Edgar Varèse) (both 1963) are fastidious to a fault, and he describes them in terms of clear structural strategies being created through dynamic shaping and manipulation of density. But by *Epilogos II* (for John Cage) of 1964, he has moved decisively towards a Cagian aesthetic of controlled randomness and the piece flattens exploit narrative by stuttering onwards, ever outcoursier and outcoursier. Tenney's electronic music is characterised by sonic clarity and a passionate sensibility that's alien to the kind of detached electronics that seems designed purely to demonstrate the powers of technology. *Fabric For Ché* (1967) is heavy with political fervour, and the famous *Tone An (rising)* (1969) has its roots in the Shepard tone—an Escher-like sonic illusion of an eternally rising glissando invented by fellow Bell Labs employee Roger N. Shepard in 1964—while Tenney crafted into an electronic love song filled with subtly erotic undertones dedicated to his then wife.

"I generated what became known as the Shepard tone when Roger Shepard said he was interested in creating something that would behave like an Escher staircase, and he then used it in his psychological perceptual experiments," says Tenney. "But *Tone An (rising)* is not really a Shepard tone. One of the important aspects of the Shepard tone is that all the components are an octave apart, so you're not really hearing the different components because they merge into a single tone. But in my piece the components





are a minor sixth apart, and you can definitely hear how I've separated them. Part of the interest of the piece is that you can focus on different pitch areas, and the shape of your musical experience is very much self-determined."

Tenney's adoption of the Shepard tone would act as a catalyst for the music of Jean-Claude Risset and even impact on the Piano Études of György Ligeti, but his own explorations of electronic music were now at an end.

"I'm not a knob turner," Tenney declares, "I like to write programs." He is describing how the tectonic plates shifted in his career. "In 1970 I moved from New York to begin teaching at the California Institute of the Arts, and discovered they didn't have computer music facilities. But what I saw around me were all these wonderful players, and this new situation inspired my *Postal Pieces* and I've been dealing with live performance and acoustical instruments ever since."

Tenney's *Postal Pieces* (1965-71) are in the lineage of Henry Cowell's mobile works. Each piece is printed on a poster containing minimum instructions for the performer to interpret. Via this "score," he licenses them to carry out a musical act, but also places what he describes as "constraints" on their actions. The most famous of the set, *Having Never Written A Note For Percussion*, consists of a single note and an instruction to crescendo from almost nothing to extremely loud and back again, a process that lasts some 15 minutes. The solo double bass piece *Beast* — written for Cecil Taylor's bassist Buell Neidinger — is constrained by the player having to listen for the harmonic interference produced by the simultaneous bowing of two strings. With the *Postal Pieces*, Tenney set out his stall as a composer for acoustic instruments.

"I didn't specify which instrument *Having Never Written A Note For Percussion* should be played on," he explains. "It's often done on a tam-tam and it brings out sounds from the instrument that we're hardly aware of when it's used in its standard way during an orchestral climax. But suddenly the instrument sings individual tones from its mid-dynamic range and is very beautiful. To a certain extent these pieces are highly predictable. The audience know from the first few seconds after the percussionist begins to roll on the tam-tam what's going to happen, but because there's no dramatic content they can concentrate fully on the quality and the shaping of the sounds."

Flip forward to 1988 and Tenney has channelled these nascent principles into his orchestral piece *Critical Band*, and opened his music up to the potential of alternative tunings. He categorises the shape of *Having Never Written A Note For Percussion* as a "swell," a recurring technique in his work in which new tones flow imperceptibly into an ongoing sound continuum. In *Critical Band* the first melodic intervals that he has plucked from the harmonic series are so minuscule that the players gauge their progress against the wobbling of harmonic interference.

"I'd come across the idea of stochastic music in the writings of Xenakis," he elucidates, "but needed to redefine it for myself. He defined stochastics as generating music based on the laws of probabilities, but I was interested in placing constraints on randomness to create a unique form within each piece. In *Critical Band* the constraint is the range of pitches I give the performers. It starts out with a range of bandwidth of zero [it begins on the same

note] and then broadens until it eventually occupies a five octave span. But in the notation, I ask players to make their own decisions about exactly which pitch to play within a given time segment. So there's a tightly controlled unpredictable aspect to it, and it's these constraints that create the form."

When John Cage heard *Critical Band* it altered his credo that harmony needed to be rule-based and repressive, and unlocked a thought process that resulted in his series of so-called "number pieces", completed in the last few years of his life, which explored his concept of "aesthetic harmony". Schoenberg famously told Cage that his lack of feeling for conventional harmony would mean he'd spend his time banging his head against a brick wall, but intriguingly it was Tenney's instinct about the cul de sac of Schoenberg's own serial-based harmony that obliged him to forge new harmonic concepts from within the harmonic series which, in turn, inspired Cage.

"Harmony evolved for several hundred years until about 1910, when it came to a dead stop with Schoenberg," he suggests. "It reached a point where you couldn't do more within equal temperament, and for there to be a continued evolution of the harmonic aspect of music it's become necessary to deal with other tunings. But I don't go along with Lou Harrison's statement that 'Just intonation is the best intonation'. Equal temperament was a very useful solution to the problems that existed of how to tune keyboards, and it worked extremely well for a long period of time. My point is that it's a less useful now — if I want to do a piece that's pure texture then 12-tone temperament isn't bad, but 24-note or 31-note temperament is even better, and increases the possibilities of greater density."

Back in *The Wire* 220 Frederic Rzewski castigated faceless orchestral institutions, claiming that it was impossible to do anything experimental with orchestras. Tenney is less antagonistic. His latest project is a new orchestral work for The Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra involving 12 alternately tuned notes taken from the harmonic series. One of the practical concerns he faces with such a venture is finding notation for alternative tunings that regular orchestral players can cope with. It's hard work, he admits, but he expects it to be hard.

"When you write music in equal temperament and give it to an orchestra you're getting approximations, so I'm just asking them to approximate something else," he explains. "When the orchestra invited me to write this piece they knew that I work with alternate tunings, so they're inviting me to write in some unusual tuning system. I had an experience with a different German orchestra where the concert master was saying, 'Why do you composers keep writing music that makes us sound bad?' After the rehearsal I went back to my hotel room and looked up the word 'mutiny' in my German dictionary, so I could explain what I was afraid might happen. But it didn't. You know what happened? The musicians went home and they practised. Then they understood and played it beautifully."

"Musicians now are so skillful that they can sight-read most music that's given to them — the portions where that's all they expect to do," Tenney concludes. "As composers it's our duty to tell them that that's not good enough. And slowly I think we're getting there." □ Pia Don for percussion ensemble is out this month on *Hat HUT: A James Tenney 70th birthday celebration concert takes place on 11 May at New York Altria Whitney Museum of American Art*



## TENNEY ON CD

### SELECTED WORKS 1981-1989

(NEW WORLD) 2003

Beginning with *Blue Suite* and ending with *For Ann (rising)*, this tells the story of Tenney's period as the trailblazing American electronic music composer. What becomes immediately obvious is that the "musical" part of the equation is more important than the "electronic," and Tenney's determination to force technology to yield to his ideas mean the pieces remain freshly baked and undiminished by their now obsolete hardware. The layrhythmic *Exigodes II* (for John Cage) has strong claims to be his masterpiece.

### POSTAL PIECES

(NEW WORLD) 2004

This complete anthology of Tenney's *Postal Pieces* was released to celebrate his 70th birthday, and The Bertin Workshop directed by James Fulkerson could hardly retain its challenges more. Bassist Joe Terman listens for harmonic interference as he moves onward through *Beast*. Percussionist Tobias Liebsch generates opulent overtone detail from a single tam-tam crescendo, diminishing stretched over 13 minutes in *Having Never Written A Note For Percussion*, and viola player Elisabeth Sussell's perpetually rising glissandi heard on *Koan*—an acoustic cousin of *For Ann (rising)*—is no mean feat. Then there's the singing of a round and a 42-minute musical puzzle for harpist Ulrike Von Meier to solve.

### THE SOLO WORKS FOR PERCUSSION

(HAT HUT) 1998

Another, more expansive version of *Having Never Written...* from German percussionist Matthias Kaul, and a performance of *Exigodes II* (for John Cage) with an added graphic score that invites performers to react spontaneously to the original electronic sounds. *Deus Ex Machine* replies to the scenario set up by Alvin Lucier in his *I Am Sitting In A Room*. In Tenney's version, the percussionist disappears halfway through the performance leaving the audience listening to their own sounds fed back at them through loudspeakers.

### MUSIC FOR VIOLIN AND PIANO

(HAT HUT) 1999

Meco Sistiak (violin) and Stephen Clarke (piano) with instrumental responses to *Exigodes II* (for John Cage) and another look at *Koan*. *3 Pages In The Shape Of A Pear* (1995), *Chronicle* (1974), *Diaphonic Toccata* and *Diaphonic Trio* (both 1997) are Tenney at his most whimsical, exploring understated melodic lines and intensely subtle gradations of tuning. An earlier Hat Hut disc of his piano music (containing *Bridge and Rocking*) has been deleted.

### CRITICAL BANG

(MODE) 1992

The piece that inspired John Cage to rethink his until then fruitful opposition to conventional harmony is a beautiful thing, here given a hypersensitive and meticulous performance by The Relliche Ensemble.

### FORMS 1-4

(HAT HUT) 2002

From Critical Band's example Cage developed his "number pieces", and in *Forms 1-4* Tenney responded by adapting for himself the "time bracket" notation Cage devised to generate his so-called "anachronistic harmony". Each piece comes with a dedication—to Varèse, Cage, Stefan Wolpe and Morton Feldman respectively—and Tenney evokes these composers' soundworlds while forging ahead with his own explorations of delicate orchestral textures and alternately tuned spectra. As Critical Band and *Forms* reveal, he has a unique approach to invigorating tired orchestral custom. More of his orchestral music is surely needed on disc.

### PIKA-DOO

(HAT HUT) 2005

Pika-Doo protests about the atom bomb attacks on Japan in 1945. Tenney considers this event "the birth of my consciousness", and his piece layers a montage of spoken voices against menacing percussion writing. Tenney's objective view on his material nudges the work away from mere propaganda, and his concentration on the fabric of sound itself rather than theatrical spectacle leads to psychologically disconcerting results. □



# THE MASK OF Sorrow



ME DOOM, KING GEEDORAH, VIKTOR VAUGHN, MADVILLAIN, ZEV LOVE X.  
BEHIND THE METAL-FACED MASK THAT WEARS A FROWN, WHICH IS THE REAL  
DANIEL DUMILEY HUA HSU SHADOWS ONE OF UNDERGROUND HIPHOP'S MOST  
MYSTERIOUS FIGURES IN ORDER TO PENETRATE HIS CAST OF INVENTED  
PERSONAE TO FIND THE SADDEST HIPHOP EVER TOLD.  
PHOTOS, JO ANN TOY

**The mask must be in the box** — one of those black flightcases with reinforced metal corners. It's as long as a loaf of bread but wider and half as thick. The sturdy clasp and metal fittings suggest importance; the box itself looks like it could withstand severe interrogation without coughing up its secrets.

The first time I meet Daniel Dumile, there is no sign of the rapper MF Doom. Doom is known for two things: fantastically dense rhymes and an impassive silver mask that rarely leaves his face. Dumile is known for being Doom. The first time I meet Dumile, it is in the back of a club in Chicago, and the mask is in this box, clutched against his body. Headphones pinch his neck and his fingers grasp a bottle of Coke with barely one swig left. His perfectly round belly juts from under a shirt that, surprisingly, isn't baggy enough to obscure it. Everything about his physical presence — the way he stands: the way his glasses crookedly slide across his face; the gold fronts and the jagged, gummy smile; the random sprigs of cheek fuzz: the way he desperately hugs the box — is a bit off. It is loud in the back of the club, so we retreat to the truck his manager has rented for the next two days. The truck is in a back alleyway, beneath a thin membrane of snow.

The mask is on the floor. I know this because as I am climbing into the back row of the truck, I feel something underfoot — I look down and the mask is on the floor, face down, harmless. I softly boot it out of the way. As Dumile and his crew climb in, nobody seems to care. He picks the mask up off the floor, places it in his lap and continues protecting his box. He and a friend gossip about the rapper Viktor Vaughn — they wonder what Vaughn will do next, speculating as if he were a real person and not merely one of Dumile's many stage names. But then again, they are never real.

Dumile opens the box. It is filled with CDs. First mystery solved.

### THE THREE

Daniel Dumile's artistic life consists of three movements. As a teenager, Dumile rapped under the name Zev Love X as part of KMD, a group he had started with his brother, Dinglewiz. Precocious and witty, KMD found middle success at the dawn of the 1990s as contemporaries of Brand Nubian and the Native Tongues collective. This is the first part. Dumile talks only sparingly about the second: the years between his brother's death in 1993 (and KMD's subsequent disbandment) and 1996, when he resurfaced, unannounced, at an open mic poetry session at New York's Nuyorican Poets' Cafe. It was the first time in years that he had appeared in public and he wore a stocking cap over his face. "I was like a new MC," he remembers.

We are in the midst of the third movement, the one that began that night and has, you could say, redeemed Dumile. These are the years that allow him to look back at the first 25 or so and not feel persecuted by questions and memories. His solo career has inspired a cult-like following. He rarely appears in public without a metal faceplate constructed out of a replica from the film *Gladiator*. Since 1999, he has released six solo albums; collaborative projects with Madlib, MC Grimm and The Monster Island Crew; and at least six volumes of instrumental. He currently records under the names King Gizzard (on Big Dada), Viktor Vaughn (on Sound/ink) and MF Doom, and he is toying with the idea of bringing Zev back as well. He is best known for being Doom, the central character on two of his better albums, the disarming 1999 debut *Derspoer*: Domsday (Fondle 'Em) and last year's celebrated *Madvillainy* (Stones Throw), recorded with fellow

recuse Madlib under the name Madvillain. In the coming year, there are plans for a Madvillain follow-up, a new KMD album and possible collaborations with Wu-Tang Clanman and fellow associative thinker Ghostface Killah.

It is often difficult to parse where one of Dumile's character ends and another begins, because all of them are variations on the same theme. "The classic villain with a mask, *Phantom Of The Operastyle*," he explains. "There's a little Dr. Doom in there, even a little Destro from *G.I. Joe*. It's an icon of American culture." The fact that all of his characters traffic from behind the same mask complicates matters, as does Dumile's tendency to conflate the details of each one's storyline. Each character's respective rhyme style doesn't betray identity either — they all speculate their hyperimagined, first to third person raps with the same Old English chivalry and pop dustbin references. But Dumile relishes the instability. It makes for sharper twists and richer cliffhangers. "The villain," he eagerly adds, "always returns."

### MUCH DAMAGED

In 1990, Americans truly feared a black planet. According to a Gallup poll released that year, the "average" American, no doubt influenced by the media and popular culture, estimated that about 30 per cent of the nation's population was black. Yet at the time the black Americans constituted maybe half of that figure: even that estimate required context. The 1990 election of Ronald Reagan coincided with an overhaul of the longstanding war on drugs. The war became more than a legislative package: it was a mandate, a way of recalibrating the idea of crime. Over the next 20 years, a drop in the crime rate (a dip social scientists argue would have happened regardless of Reagan) coincided with a rapid expansion of American prisons, and a feverish crusade to fill them as quickly and efficiently as possible. Currently, the Justice Department reports that one eighth of black Americans in their twenties and early thirties were incarcerated last year. A black man in the United States has a one in three chance of going to prison. A weird thing happened over those 20 years: people started disappearing.

### POSITIVE KAUSE

Just as every assassin has a grammar school classmate, every villain starts out as a mere good. Dumile was born in London in the early '70s and his family shuttled between New York's boroughs before settling in Long Island. Hip-hop was a constant for Daniel and Dinglewiz. They would preserve late night Hip-hop radio broadcasts by holding a tape recorder up to the old crack radio they shared. In 1985, the brothers had scraped together enough cash to buy some modest recording equipment. They gave themselves a name befitting two part-time graffitiists: Kausen' Much Damage, or KMD for short. Daniel renamed himself Zev Love X; Dinglewiz became Subroc.

It was an innocent time. De La Soul and JVC Force had secured Long Island's place in Hip-hop lore and Dumile grew up a half-generation behind Public Enemy, EPMD and De La, who he refers to as his "college" crew. In neighbouring Park Rockaway, Queens, lived a young rapper named MC Serch. Serch and Dumile became fast friends, and when it came time for Serch and his group 3rd Bass to ink a deal with Def Jam, he asked Dumile if he wanted to take a guest verse on one of their singles.

The result was 1990's "Gas Face". Built on the prattling piano of Aretha Franklin's "Respect" and

smari-sleazy ribbing, the track was one of the best and most joyful singles of what has become esteemed as Hip-hop's Golden Era. "I kinda came up with the concept," Dumile recalls. "We used to joke around a lot, so I came up with the term 'gas face' — it's just that face you make when you're shocked or surprised. Like when somebody catches you off-guard."

Soon after, KMD signed with Elektra Records and set to work on their debut, *Mr Hood* (1991). They had rebranded their moniker — it now stood for "a positive Kause in a Much Damaged society" — and added a third member, Derys The Birthstone Kid. Dumile and his brother were both in their teens and they would troop from Long Island to Manhattan's Chung King Studios every night. "We did that whole album at night. The whole album is exactly how it was: me in my mom's car, doing beats, 'cuz we had for extra cash, trading records and whatnot. Fun times, you know? It was adolescence, that teenage time."

The *Mr Hood* sleeve features a black and white photograph of African-American children playing in the streets of New York. Taken by Arthur Leipzig in 1950, there is tranquility to the scene, a concentrated stillness to the young boy leaping among chalk-outlined squares on the pavement, to the delight of hypnotized onlookers. Even though you shudder to think what might have been happening just beyond the frame, Leipzig's image fixes on something above politics. The boy is not yet a man. He is entitled to his unbridled joy, to bask in the eternal summer of youth.

In the background — in screaming, dayglo colour — stand the members of KMD, but they might as well be part of the original photo. *Mr Hood* feels untouched, it is infected with the buoyancy and optimism of puberty. It is fun. "Crackles" details the evolution of a playground bully-turned-neighbourhood duffer with an almost dog-eared innocence, while the cork-pop fizz of "Peachfuzz" finds the trio eager to grow, counting their chin hairs and puffing their chests in the mirror. They sample liberally from Sesame Street. While the standout single "Who Me?" assails longstanding stereotypes of African-Americans — the song begins with an excerpt from a children's record about a character named Little Sambo — its slapstick funk backing douses some of its threat. *Mr Hood* has plenty of rage — against stereotypes, inequality and the not-yet-enlightened — but it is a manageable, pinstriped rage. In the top right corner of the album sleeve is the KMD "Sember" logo, a crossed-out cartoon of a white man in blackface, but even this suggests a degree of playfulness.

The album was mildly successful. A video for "Peachfuzz" cracked MTV's rotation and the trio toured with the likes of Queen Latifah, Digital Underground, Big Daddy Kane and 3rd Bass. The brothers were working it out.

Their parents had separated and the two remaining men of the house leaned on Hip-hop to lift their mother and sister out of poverty. They reserved very modest hopes for themselves: "Get our own crib and have kids, like it's supposed to be." When it came time to record their follow-up in 1993, what was "supposed to be" didn't gel with the reality of young adulthood. The departure of Onyx had left KMD a duo, Daniel and Dinglewiz were older, and their lyrics bore a wearier, worldly edge. They decided on the title *Black Bastards*.

"Crazy time right there," Dumile sighs slowly. "That's when we were growing up. During the album, I had my first son and my brother had his daughter — early manhood memories. Things was changing, sh't was going crazy, both in the game and in life."

"The game was changing — gangsta rap took over the sh't. Then, just being that age, a lot of stuff happens, too." He pauses, searching for the language



to match the glare overtaking his eyes. "Especially living in America, being brown people, or whatever you want to call it, that age is a very tropical time. That's when you get hit with a lot of props."

#### I HEAR VOICES

Dumile had crossed the line, the traps were set, he had turned 20. "In this country, being original people, a lot of things be happening at a certain age, right when you reach manhood. A lot of things start happening. Strange shit." Dumile's friends started disappearing — "murdered, jailed or whatever." One day, he looked around and everything had changed. He no longer a carefree teen with a record deal and respect on his pockets. He was a young man. "I'm just noticing my peoples disappearing — good people, not bad people. Now, I'm like the only one left from that era with my crew. With two songs left to record, Dumile's brother joined the missing. Subroc was killed in a freak car accident.

"How did I deal with it?" he asks. "I don't even know. I had to stay focused. I had to make sure we came up out of it. The goals that me and my brother set... they had to still be met. It was up to me. You know what it reminded me of? We was big Boogie Down Productions fans back in the days. When that thing happened to Scott LaRock [the BDP DJ was shot in the street in 1987] — God bless — it was kinda like... a prefigure to this, to what happened. When that happened and we both peeped it, automatically we thought of ourselves in those shoes. If the same thing was to happen to one of us — you know what I'm sayin' — what would we do?"

"So we saw how Kris [KRS-One] handled that situation," he continues. "He could have quit. We didn't know what he was going to do. Was he going to come out with another album? Then he came with that shit — [1988's] *By All Means Necessary*. So that showed us what to do in that situation. You persevere, you keep going, you strive and you do it. So it made us ready for something to happen in life."

As a young teen, witnessing his hero KRS-One recover from the murder of his beloved partner LaRock had intellectually prepared Dumile for such a loss. He did his best to stow the pain away until later, soldiering ahead with *Black Bastards* and pouring himself into the album's dense funk and sharp polemics.

At times, *Black Bastards* is every bit as playful and supple as Mr. Hood's "Sweet Premium Wine" and the skit-charged "Plumzinger" indulge harmless libertine urges, while the charmingly raffish "Contact Bitch" finds KMD graduating from mom's crib to a hot-boxed tour. But gone are the play-acted rage and wide-eyed boyishness. Instead of Sesame Street and children's records, there are vocal samples from Melvin Van Peebles's shockingly defiant *Sweet Sweetback's Bassness* Soundtrack and *The Last Poets'* Gylan Kain's brooding *Black Guerrilla* album. This, after all, was the anxious, brooding record Dumile played at Subroc's funeral, a scene 3rd Bass's Pete Nice described to *Spin* magazine as "just surreal."

One difference between KMD and other HipHop groups is contained in the difference between two epithets: "nigga" and "samba." After a stormy, much-debated career, the former term has been reclaimed and rehabilitated by African-American culture, its denotations ranging from a term of endearment to one of wicked, macho endorsement. The latter, though, remains an ugly term from a distant time; there is no way to flip or ironise a word designed to reduce African-American males to clay, easily formed babies.

As their peers perfected their lean, heartless glares and struts, KMD fretted about self-destruction. The Dumiles had been raised as part of the Five Percent

Nation, an offshoot of the black Muslim faith that also counted Wu-Tang Clan, Grand Nubian and Rakim as adherents. They sought to reconstruct the "dead, dumb and blind" heathen, but they wanted to do it in a sympathetic, playful way, as boys but not babies. At times, the album seems to laugh to keep from crying. The cover of *Black Bastards* featured a crude drawing of the half-grinning, half-exasperated Samba being hung. Lincyching the logo was meant to suggest the death of a stereotype.

In April 1994, one month before its slated release, a *Billboard* columnist named Tern Rossi came across the cover artwork. Rossi, who neither listened to the album nor understood KMD's ironic intentions, wrote a profile for *Entertainment Weekly* titled "Eekies, Jackie Martinez, head of KMD's Hit U DIT Management, argued that it addressed 'what [black] people were once portrayed as, nothing more than that. The artwork is just the opposite of what people interpreted it to be."

At the time, though, the recording industry found itself a tempting pawn in the culture wars. Only two years earlier, the furor around Ice-T's "Cop Killer" had led to high-profile boycotts, divestment campaigns and testy debates about public morality. The last thing KMD's label wanted was anything resembling controversy. Short of ditching the cover, there was no way to quell Rossi. Dumile, who had drawn the picture, would not relent. The album was pulled from production and KMD were released from their contract. (The complete version only appeared in 2000, on the Subversive label.)

"Can you imagine?" he asks, exasperated. "During a six month period, it was like, shit was changing so drastically fast, in all aspects. It was some hard shit. At the time it didn't seem so crazy but now when I think of it, it was some hard times."

So Dumile did what he had to: he disappeared, too.

#### COLD FISSION

A mess of bodies smear themselves against the glass-walled DJ booth, eager to see what is happening. Despite blizzard warnings, curious Chicagoans have shown up en masse to see a rare DJ appearance by MF Doom. Earlier that night, with no mask, Dumile roamed the club freely, clutching his box and socks. Now, hundreds of fans crane their necks, elbow for room and tiptoe on each other's toes, just to catch a spare glimpse of Doom's face, which is covered by a mask.

HipHop celebrity can be a curious thing. HipHop presents itself as a wholly literal music, concerned less with themes or symbols than reportage. It is judged by the quality of autobiographical minutiae and the guisesomeness of the first person and it becomes a given that, when Rapper X mutters that he committed Act Y, he is offering some approximation of the truth. These are the kinds of meta-issues Dumile ruminated on during his years away from HipHop's machinery.

Dumile rarely offers details about this unintended sabbatical. When nudged, he laughs, "I plead the fifth." He divided his time between Atlanta, where his family had relocated, and New York, where he still lived. Mostly, he was busy raising his son and piecing together a recording budget. He began dating the woman he would later marry. He poured himself into the next *Black Bastards* operation, *Operation Doomsday*. At the time, he was subsisting on the barest of necessities: a few old records, his faith and the occasional beer.

"At that time, I was damn near homeless, walking the streets of Manhattan, sleeping on benches and shit," he admits. He says that the next KMD album (tentative title: *Mental Nivessa*) will focus on these

"lost years." "It was a really, really dark time. But I still thought 'I was gonna get my, regardless.'"

Dumile knew he was at least as good as the rappers who bubbled to the surface in the mid-1990s. He was lifelines removed from being Zaw Love X; whenever he heard songs like "Peachfuzz" he felt weird. He saw HipHop as a masquerade ball, and he needed a creative way to crash it. "In HipHop, we get kinda confused," he says. "I think we limit ourselves with the whole 'I'm the guy' kind of thing. Like, 'I'm this, you that'. In HipHop you're the guy, and it's too much responsibility — you don't want to be that guy. So I'm like, if HipHop is all about bragging and boasting, then I'm going to make the illest character who can brag about all kinds of shit. Like, why not? It's all your imagination — go as far as you want."

Dumile renamed himself MF Doom — MF stood for Metal Face, while Doom was both homage to the consummate Marvel Comics villain Dr Doom and an adaptation of a childhood nickname. The more he thought about his creation, the more it intrigued him. "The way comics are written shows you the duality of things, how the bad guy ain't really a bad guy if you look at it from his perspective. Through that style of writing, I was kinda like, if I flip that into HipHop, that's something niggas ain't done yet. I was looking for an angle that would be brand new. That's when I came up with the character and worked out the kinks — that's the Villain."

The character gave a story arc to the mountain of tracks he had recorded since *Black Bastards*, in 1997 Bobbito Garcia, a friend from the "Gas Face" days, released some of the Doom material on his fledgling Florida "Em label, to delicious reviews. Dumile returned to the stage in 1999 and his debut album followed later that year. Musically, the album was highly unusual. Headcasing the soft sounds of 1980s soul and squeezing the last ounces of life from exhausted sample sources, *Doomsday* sounded like an eerie echo of days past. "That's the nature of the production style of Doom," he explains, "the obvious/not-obvious, the in-between. Using what you have to make something totally new. I had a limited number of [records] then. I was like, yo, there's something in-between that I have to get. There's infinite amounts of layers and dimensions, it's just, which one can you tap into?" Swearing vengeance on the industry that had disfigured him, Doom became one of HipHop's most colorful folk heroes. "I'm an author. It just happens that what I write is in rhythmic form and it's over music. So it goes to a different point, across, just like an author would in a novel. I come with different characters." In 2003 he released *Take Me To Your Leader* as King Geedorah (inspired by Godzilla's peer, Gidorah), and another, *Uvulvibe Wlaik*, as Viktor Vaughn (adapted from Dr Doom's real name, Victor Von Doom). Dumile explains the method in his mixtapes: "I can make multiple characters, and they can even have conflicting views. We're growing up as all this is going on — we're going to change our minds. The public looks at that and is like, oh, he's contradicting himself. When you got multiple characters you never contradict yourself. Have another character come with another point of view."

The most thrilling aspect of all this is that the themes rarely betray the identity of the narrator. Doom's characters pose up as guests at each other's dinners; they high-five each other with production duties; and Dumile looms above them, unafraid to lapse into second or third person. He is quick to point out that all of these characters are characters, not shades of his (or Doom's) personality. "I never interject," he claims. "I keep myself out of it — I feel I'm too corny. It's not going to be fun. It's gotta be those guys." There are subtle differences. Geedorah's *Take Me To Your Leader*



assesses Earth matters from the perspective of a "space monster" – "King Geedorah, three-finger ring fever/Spring chicken eater/Dad as the ringleader," he offers by way of introduction, before asking, "Who needs a heater?" The Geedorah disc makes its point by painting Earth racism, Earth hedonism and Earth corruption in the most outlandish terms possible – the truth is disguised in his science fictions. Vaughn is more of a straight shooter, a 1980s-obsessed thug with bloated self-esteem – "Viktor the director flip a script like Rob Reiner/The way a lotta dudes rhyme their names should be 'knob-shiner.'" "Vik is frustrated now," Dumile sighs.

Doom – "Bound to go three-pat/Came to destroy rap" – is the most interesting character, the misunderstood villain who loves humanity but hates humans. "From the point of view [of America], we're the villains. But I'm the super-villain." The point of the ruse is to find a different way to convey the same message from his KMD days. "Out here it's been so desensitized... I had to figure out a way to get the point across and still make it interesting, or make it seem like a race thing.

"Doom is about bringing people together," he continues. "I like to show different perspectives – put yourself in this guy's shoes for a second and this guy ain't so different from you. The Villain could be anybody. The character Doom is a brown person, but he could be anybody, any race." The mask reminds you to pay attention to the words, not the personality.

Although Dumile uses his characters to talk about things that concern him, he maintains that they never betray his actual emotional make-up. This is hard to believe. Noticeable for droopy, downcast arrangements and Dumile's slurred verses, Doom's records can sound exceedingly sad. Sometimes it seems as though the characters are a way to distract from his melancholy, or at least disguise it as otherworldly fantasy. Sometimes they seem haunted by the memory of his brother, even as he resists recording a song that directly speaks to his feelings. On "Doomsday", he defuses that yearning with an aw-shucks concern over etchings: "Ever since the womb till I'm back where my brother went/That's what my tumb will say/Right above my government, Dumile (Doom-will-say)/Either unmarked or engraved – hey, who's to say?" "Gas Drawls" finds him cracking a brew for Subroc – "I hit the brew up like... nobody knows... how [Zev Love] X the unseen feels" – before veering way off-course, to ridicule rivals and then curse "the invisible bitch" from the Fantastic Four.

It's easy to dismiss Dumile when he raps that all he needs is a "metal-face mask with a built-in frown" ("It Ain't Nuttin'") and a steady supply of beers (nearly every other song) when the adjacent verse invokes space monsters or, on his latest disc, Mm... Food (Rhymesayers), meats and spices. Even when Dumile reminisces that he and Subroc "is like the brown Smothers Brothers" ("Kon Kame"), he maintains that this is actually Doom's voice. At the very least, it is Zev. But it is never Dumile. "All of them are characters," he insists, "they're never me." Perhaps.

Sometimes, Dumile doesn't even seem like Dumile, as though he really doesn't feel himself without the mask. While those around him disappeared, he replicated himself, just to keep good company. His stable of characters continues to hint at the saddest story HipHop has ever told but, like some HipHop Charlie Kaufman, even Dumile himself doesn't claim to know what they will end up doing or saying. They are beyond his control, following their own arcs.

"Them dudes are crazy," he laughs. "They can do it. Doom is an ill character – he's going to be around forever. I look up to that dude." □ MF Doom's Mm... Food is out this month on Rhymesayers



# Charts

## Playlists from the outer limits

### Dodgy Group Names

**Kiss The Asses Of A Black Cat**  
**Polecat Avertigade**  
**Tephoaterones**  
**Gastrix Female Reflex**  
**Yoko Homo**  
**Zombies Under Stone**  
**Screamings Metal Accountants**  
**Temporary Darkening Of The Steel**  
**Results Of Intending**  
**The Band Formerly Known As Savage**  
**Sneak Year Blitch**  
**Hill's Social**  
**Pasta DeMilo**  
**Violent Ramp**  
**Alcoholocaust**

All general group names compiled by The Trawler

We welcome charts from record shops, radio shows, clubs, DJs, labels, musicians, readers, etc. Email: [charts@wired.co.uk](mailto:charts@wired.co.uk)

The week of Dope: see page 44

### Monika 15

**Cocoonize**  
 La Maison Du Min Rite (Touch And Go)  
**Various**  
 Pop Ambient 2006 (Kompakt)  
**Various**  
 Monika Force (Monika)  
**Candi Staton**  
 Pop! Backbeat Mix (Honest Jone)  
**Thomas Fehlmann**  
 Lowflow (Pug Research)  
**Mitchell Melillo**  
 Badini (Badini/Monika)  
**Gabriel Akaide**  
 Auf Der Wende (Pestlephor)  
**TV On The Radio**  
 Trinn Song (A&R)  
**Tania Benitez**  
 TBA (New Error)  
**Cio D'or**  
 Hoken Police EP (TheBastard)  
**Pascal Schüller**  
 Melodysenses (Karsake Kalk)  
**Rivulous**  
 Abuse Karloff (Recordings)  
**Hik Cave And The Red Seeds**  
 Abandon Blues/The Line Of Orpheus (Musi)  
**Troika (Burger)**  
 In Finitumum (Kompakt)  
**The Post Industrial Boys**  
 Mac Error

Compiled by Gadget Gut, [www.monika-entertainment.de](http://www.monika-entertainment.de)

### Oblique Motion 15

**Wolf Eyes & Double Lizards**  
 Branding Volume Vol 1 (American Tapes)  
**Rhythm & Sound**  
 Sem Mi Yeh (Bum! Mix)  
**Hush Arbore**  
 Under Bird Lamb Trees (Digitale Industries)  
**Robbie Basho**  
 Venice In December (Blue Thumb)  
**Kaynes**  
 Kometwaku (Nu Labell)  
**Karin Koyama Travelling Band**  
 A Selenographic Line (Luthe)  
**Sven Olli**  
 The Libertine Of Samhan (Bastard)  
**Monotones**  
 Floating Gardens (De Styl)  
**Various**  
 Bunk-Tue Mall: Field Recordings From Mall (Sublime Frequencies)  
**Sir Richard Bishop**  
 Improvisation (Luthe)  
**Ramones II**  
 Postmonia (Frog Digital)  
**Clypse**  
 Crescent (Pseudoscience)  
**Cornel Schnitzler**  
 Con T2 (Gems)  
**Martina Nadler**  
 Beliefs Of Living And Dying (Solipses)  
**Nive Mind**  
 Death Tone (Hanson)

Compiled by Oblique Motion, WIMUC, Mondays & Sundays EST, [www.wimuc.com](http://www.wimuc.com)

### The Office Ambience

**John Zorn**  
 (Ruhls Tordis)  
**Bliss**  
 P1 (Mush)  
**Various**  
 Everything Comes And Goes: A Tribute To Black Sabbath (Temporary Residence)  
**Bill Fay**  
 Tomorrow Tomorrow And Tomorrow (Kurtis Jenson)  
**High On Fire**  
 Beyond Black Wings (Relapse)  
**Bandriver**  
 Fear Of A Black Tarpent (Big Dada)  
**Pinkie Masters & John Wills**  
 Cuts Creds (Twingle)  
**Alasdair Roberts**  
 No Empty Min (Dmg City)  
**Cold Black Heat**  
 It's Magnificent, But It Isn't War (Family Vineyard)  
**Kelp & The Fine Players**  
 Between Us (Flagline)  
**Various**  
 You Shall Know The Roots By The Fruits (Eigertree Ltd)  
**Vans**  
 Hardcore Beach 07 Vinyl Records CD)  
**Dunton & Nazari**  
 The Earth Is Blue (20/20/20)  
**Teravator**  
 The Needle With Travelling (Mon Music)  
**Spring And One Woman**  
 Early Recordings (Vinyl On Demand)

Compiled by The Wire Sound System



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Damon & Naomi with Michio Kurihara (left), reviewed in *Soundcheck*

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 London, UK

# Soundcheck

This month's selected CDs and vinyl



Howled for rhythm: Konono No 1

## KONONO NO 1 CONGOTRONICS GRAMMED DISCS CD

In Africa, corrupt and irresponsible governance has led some of the continent's most prominent modern musicians to cast themselves as surrogate leader figures – think of Fela Kuti and his republic of Kalakuta, King Sunny Adé, the priestly chieftainship of Youssou N'Dour. Africa is a land mass scarred with artificial borderlines. Regions scrawled on colonial maps, gouged arbitrary divisions between tribal and ethnic separations that had lasted for centuries, sundering communities while boxing sworn enemies into tighter and tighter confines. When these tensions ignite skirmishes and the flames spread, as happened in Congo and Zaïre in the late 90s, the rifts become rivers with blood on an epic scale. Belgian withdrawal from the colonies left a power vacuum that was never fully filled, while the rapid centralisation of the economy in Kinshasa marginalised Congo's forest dwelling population; the resulting migrants from jungle to city have had to develop an immunity to the alienating increase in speed and volume they find in the streets. In the clash of cultures in the conurbations of the developing world, the musical ramifications have been severe, and in many cases astonishing.

The Belgian label Grammed has inaugurated their Congotronics series to document Kinshasa's amplified street bands, jerrybuilt affairs whose equipment looks like cast-offs from a shanty town toy-change garage, with conical loudspeakers on rickety stands overloaded at intense volume, rattling

the woofers and giving an intentional patina of abrasive distortion to the PA system. The best of these, the 12-piece Konono No 1, present themselves as something between a trade union and a republic. Mingiedi Mawangu is 'The Founder', who set the group in motion 25 years ago. Buaki N'gongulu is 'The President', whose role is to dance, eccentricity and mystically, throughout sessions that can last several hours. The music is ferociously paced. Key to their sound is the amplified likembe, or thumb piano, made of sandy metal slivers – they use three of them, including one bass likembe. These are plucked in tumbling riffs, hurtling headlong and accompanied by a feverish pulsing percussion that includes a makeshift hi-hat made of clashing metal plates. This is music with its feet planted firmly on the street. Chanted lyrics address societal problems in modern Congo, and outsize the authorities. On 'Kule Kule', a story of forbidden marriage, the likembe's joints sound like they're in need of oil, folding a piercing insectal squeak into the sound. The overtones and electronically enhanced thumps from this ramshackle gear give all the basslines they need, while the overdriven higher thumb piano notes sound more like electric guitars. As you try to sift through the dense crossstalk of twittering beats, your ears are beguiled ever deeper into Konono's rhythmic thrashing machine.

A couple of years ago Konono No 1 were booked to play with Dutch hardcore improvisers The Ex in Vera, Holland. The group arrived late and exhausted, but according to Terrie Ex, their desperate state only fuelled a monstrously harsh set at deafening volume.

**Konono No 1 achieve a state of independence with their remorseless, jerrybuilt, likembe-driven sounds. By Rob Young**

That performance was released as *Lubaku* on Terp last year. The title refers to the ravine that the group felt they were in, but the reception they received in Europe seems to have carried them out of a period in which they had felt 'dead'.

The seven tracks on *Congotronics* were recorded in the Halle de la Gombe in Wushasha, apart from one live shot taken from a show at Amsterdam's Paradiso club. Their rhythms sit in an almost overlooked nook between the ancestral tribal drums of the Angolan/Congolese *Batombe*, and some kind of distorted electronics that you'd expect to find at the arse end of the *Rephlex* catalogue. It's no wonder, then, that the opening two tracks on *Congotronics*, 'Lufuala Ndonga' and 'Masikulu', have been issued as one of Fat Cat's Split Series 12"s, on a disc shared with New Zealand outsiders The Dead C. You're reminded of the shamanic leanings of groups like 23 Skidoo or Richard Kirk's post-Cabaret Voltaire project Sandoz, but the Konono beat has been arrived at from a different trajectory entirely. Far from reproducing programmed rhythms, its remorseless motion suggests an ancient *Batombe* death rattle, with the added frisson of a sense of headlong flight from some unnamed atrocity. 'Lufuala Ndonga', the group state, is 'about collective death and also about a person who died alone. It is all about death.'

When it hits its stride, this is the kind of music that gives the impression of having been flowing since the dawn of civilisation, and will continue, somewhere in the ether, even when its agents on earth have danced themselves into their tomb. □

## AGF/DELAY

### EXPLODE

AGF PRODUCTIONS/MGM CD

BY KETHI MOLINE

Berlin artist Andy Green's solo work revolves around softly spoken, highly processed cut-up texts and aperiodic, vaguely pitch-bent settings, as heard on last year's Quebecer release *Language Is The Most*. His collaboration with Toronto experimentalist Vladimir Delay combines this approach with the melodic electronica of her other outfit Laika. The result is an early beautiful collection of observational vignettes and wispy song sketches perfectly belitting an album that the duo describe as being "dedicated to nature".

The search for an uncoloured purity of expression extends to the pair's programming, eschewing his flair for complex drum sequencing — he started as a jazz percussionist — Delay favours inordinately simple, deliberate beats, with minimal bips and hums completing the musical backdrop. Much of the material is as pared down as early Sade, yet there's a warmth and humanity to the crankily skewed rhythms that keeps the record from sounding austere. The spoken word passages possess the same quiet attention to detail minutiae as Laurie Anderson, but with a slightly careworn melancholy and a slightly Andriescu-esque smug whining. The melodic, delivered in a fetchingly corporeal near-whisper, recall the more accessible end of Neko's output and the more abstract side of the work of Elisabeth Sussman aka Soles.

Green's strength is the ease with which she finds space to improvise within her texts. By insisting on a disciplined simplicity at all times, she can be electrifyingly in tune. "Explosive Baby", in which she takes a new iteration of a female suicide bomber as her inspiration, was apparently unscripted and recorded in one take. It's a deft, unaffected performance, starkly observed yet quietly tender at the same time, and is one of many highlights on this quietly great album.

## TETUZI AKIYAMA/TIM BARNES/MASAFUMI EZAKI

### FUTURO

ORIAN/BLACKT CD

BY DAVID STUBBS

Some music seems to consist of almost nothing but incidental sounds until you focus in — then a world of purposeful microscopic activity is revealed. This is true of the opening minutes of *Futuro*, recorded in 2003 at the Cafe Futuro, Osaka, Japan. Percussionist Tim Barnes (who also runs Quakebaskit) provides much of the small businesses that be Tetuzi Akiyama's orthopaedic of guitar dissects to the acoustically amplified hassas, rasps and gurgles produced by Masafumi Ezaki's enticed trumpet.

During its continuous 34 minute span, *Futuro* passes through a number of distinct stages, and the players take turns to dictate the shape and character of the music. Akiyama's role becomes increasingly important from around the five minute mark, and his fractured bottleneck slides and scratchy broken chords involve melody into what has otherwise been almost exclusively textural play, as well as bringing about a general increase in volume.

For the last eight minutes of the piece Ezaki's spare contribution is the most telling, as he refuses to enter into what threatens to become a

settled soundworld and instead provides a pithy commentary on it.

Although much of the improvising on *Futuro* is low key, and great attention is paid to a diverse range of small sounds, this isn't a reductionist music or a low-volume one. Nor is it derivative. One of the principal accusations levelled against post-1990 improvisation of all stripes is that they lack individuality where, it is asked, are the players with an identifiable music all their own? Akiyama, Barnes and Ezaki are three such players, and *Futuro* is a particularly fine example of what they do.

## ALATORY GRAMMAR

### ABCEMINDED

SPOOKSOUND VS MULTISOUND CD

BY CLIVE BELL

Another instalment of Alatory Grammar, from two musicians who have relocated to Barcelona — former New Wave New Jersey trumpeter Mark Cunningham (as Mares) and Danish electroacoustic composer Jakob Draminsky Haymark. Both have worked with Pascal Comelade, and Cunningham also describes himself as a floating member of Genesis P. Orridge's The Moxyist.

Joining him in the studio, Cunningham and Draminsky deploy their met-axes to layer loops of comfortable liveliness and rhythmic ambiguity. "Ym" sounds like some folk in a hurry shaking a wooden fence, while "act" feels darker, like a Buryish bass harp. Much of this is generated by Draminsky from self-played woodwind or strings recordings, crisscrossed through a Max/MSP environment as beloved by laptopians everywhere. However the only clear instrumental presence is Cunningham's trumpet, processed via a Kaos pad. Personally I find a little processed trumpet goes a long way, and by the third track I was longing for the emotional directness of a naked trumpet note, free of banal delay or harmonized chord. Cunningham needs to locate the off switch on his effects unit, as his alternate, Don Cherry-like sound deserves more space.

Apart from this reservation, *Alatory Grammar's* explorations are lucid and worthwhile, and the album's second half improves steadily. Electro-lyricist sounds and words feel chords lead to harder stuff, as arcade game noises spark and splash Space Invader juice over the propelling myths. *Alatory Grammar* are engaged in an experimental project of proper integrity, but there's also a pleasant, stoned jazz quality here that warms the heart.

## ALOG

### MINIATURES

RUNE GRAMMOPHON CD

BY DAVID STUBBS

Alog are Espen Sommer Herde and Dag-Are Haugen, formed in 1997 in the basement of a kindergarten in Isere, deep inside the Arctic Circle in Norway. *Miniatures* is their third album, their first since 2001's *Duck-Rabbit*. Their sound sources range from the electronically processed and formatted to raw, unmitigated acoustic instruments.

As Julian Cowley observed in his review of *Duck-Rabbit*, they are at once original and derivative, spontaneous and contrived, contradictions living together in ski. For all this, there are occasions on *Miniatures*, such as "Peace Spade" which feel just a little desolatory.

whereas little juxtapositions of sound — the minichin chitter of "The Youth Of Mystical Conversations" and the pots and pans rhythms overlaying what might be the howlings of an Italian fish market on "Biffole Demon", for example. But there are ample compensations such as "St Paul's Sessions II", whose sleighride glimmering itself glides pleasingly over a mournfully nostalgic chord in a way that's reminiscent of Terry Riley's *In C*.

The tracks which top and tail the album, however, do the most to live up to some of the more outrageous claims made for Alog. "Severe Panishment And Lasting Bliss" features an electronic motif transmitted like a frantic Morse code mantra, before it becomes engulfed in its own swirl of distortion. Best of all is "Building Instruments". Revealing Alog at their most ostensibly laudible, its brazenly acoustic improv takes its time setting itself up, before it gives way to the inhalation and exhalation of accordions, which themselves initiate a conversation in which guitars, cellos, brass and even a human voice joins in. It's music that sounds like a group of amateurs had awoken from a deep slumber in a room full of old instruments and were slowly, tentatively reacquainting themselves with their possible manual functions.

## AUTODIGEST

### A COMPRESSED HISTORY OF EVERYTHING EVER RECORDED, VOL. 2:

#### UBIQUitous ETERNAL LIVE

CRONICASH INTERNATIONAL CD

BY KETHI MOLINE

Cronikash's arch savants Autodigest serve up a second volume of postmodern pranks. Last year's Volume 1 took as its theme the reduction of real human experience to data streams and binary code, resulting in a sonic illustration of a world sucked down a technological plughole. Funny and lightning as the concept was, the spluttering digital momentum of the superbly executed music was equally strong.

Volume 2 acts as a kind of punchline to the earlier work. The album purports to collect the sounds of every audience ever recorded and crush them into one hour-long piece. As with its predecessor, the conceptual basis of the piece is simultaneously silly and unsettling. Autodigest believe that as all art is crunched into numbers our responses to it can be as well. This is an idea likely to give any liberal aesthetes the creeps, if not send them flying into an apocalyptic rage. Luckily, the new work is as carefully conceived as the older volume, allowing the listener to ponder these worrying themes at leisure as the piece unfolds purposefully.

Expansiveness the sound of an endless clamour of stadium crowds is specially deconstructing, especially when individual ones and walls are picked out and the atmosphere charges from one of mass ecstasy and adoration to one of existential pain and private alienation. Autodigest seem to be posing the notion that we get what we deserve, that the album's opening and closing "autodigestion" "Thank you and goodbye!" is a farewell to all human-mediated cultural activity.

The concept of a piece of art announcing that art is dead may not be startlingly original, but Autodigest's work might just be powerful enough to make you start to suspect that it's true.

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# Musique concrète was invented more than 50 years ago in a French radio studio. Dan Warburton splices open the GRM organisation's own selection of greatest cuts



Days of future past: Pierre Schaeffer (left), François Bayle with the phosgene

## VARIOUS ARCHIVES GRM INA IMOC

To celebrate its 30th anniversary, the French Institut National de l'Audiovisuel (INA) has produced this handsome set of five CDs, complete with an 80 page photo album, to document the electronic music produced under the auspices of Pierre Schaeffer's Groupe de Recherches Musicales (GRM). It also includes several groundbreaking works that predate its foundation in 1958. Each comes with informative background essays by important players on the scene. The English translations are sometimes inaccurate and even misleading, but otherwise *Archives GRM* is an excellent overview of a fertile and influential period in 20th century music history.

As the only explicitly "jazzy" piece on offer, André Hodey's lively if primitive big band boo montage, *Jazz Et Jazz*, is an odd way to open the first disc. *Les Visiteurs De La Musique Concrète*, but it's more fun than the po-faced *Boulez Études* that follow. Jean Barraqué explores the same territory as Boulez, but tries to reclaim the drama and emotion of Romanticism without compromising serialist discipline. Darius Milhaud's *La Rivière Endormie*, a brief radio Hôpital from 1954, is a nice surprise, though its interest in electronics only goes as far as mixing and reverb, unlike Roman Haubenstock-Ramati's *L'Amen De Verre*, which makes extensive use of the phonograph, a variable-speed tape recorder designed by Schaeffer and Jacques Poulin that allows sounds to be transposed across two octaves register. A later version incorporated a keyboard, in what was essentially a primitive sampler. Also in the studio in 1954 was Edgard Varèse, to work on the first "interpolation" for his *Deserts*, whose full brute force must have sounded terrifying at its Théâtre des Champs-Élysées premiere. Varèse subsequently tuned it down in the studios at Columbia, but here's the original in all its futurist industrial glory. Rediscovering the inscrutable crackling of Xenakis's *Concret PH* is always a pleasure, but the real revelation here is

Claude Bollif's *Points-Mouvements* (1962), a ten minute masterpiece whose patient investigation of tiny sonantises, scrapes, rattles and rubbings of diverse materials sounds more like Mark Westell or Morphogenesis. In contrast, the 15 minutes of *Tambres Durées* (1952), Olivier Messiaen's only serious foray into electronic music, drag horribly.

The second disc, *L'Art De L'Écoute*, features more familiar GRM names, including Schaeffer, whose *Étude Pathétique* opens the set. Its oddball montage of Ball, blues harp and Sacha Guitry still sounds wild. Similarly, the trilogy of Luc Ferrari studies from 1958, the cymbalom-like sheen of *Ivo Maie's Reflets* (1961) and the thrilling blasts of François-Bernard Mache's 1959 *Phélie* have all stood the test of time better than the chilly dogma of Michel Philippot's *Étude No 1* (1957). The offerings from lesser known figures including Mireille Charnass-Kyrou, Akira Tambo and Beatriz Ferreira are also impressive, none more so than Philippe Arthuis's delightful *Boîte À Musique*.

By the end of the 1960s, changes were afoot, even in the GRM's inner circle, whose members found themselves experimenting with unadulterated field recordings – Alain Savouret's *Étude Aux Sons Réalistes* is a representative example – much to the chagrin of Schaeffer, who had his sights set elsewhere, on computer technology. The third and fourth discs, *Le Son En Nombres* and *Le Temps Du Temps Réel*, document the music produced after 1978, when the GRM acquired a DEC PDP 11/60 computer, described here as "modern and powerful" (though by today's standards, 256K central memory and 2x15 minutes of autonomy at 34kHz seem positively prehistoric). An invaluable appendix – not translated into English – provides a fascinating inventory of the software available at the time.

In François Bayle's *Croc Bleu* (1979), you can hear the plasticity and hard work, but also the distinctive fluted glaucous of early digital. Gone are the plunking pianos and singing doors – in comes the poised metallic quavering of time, filtered, stretched and frozen. One only has to compare the spare textures of the earlier studies to the sprawling whoosh of Gilles

Racot's *Anamorphées* or the linkings of Bénédict Maillard's *Affluements* to realise how the urge to "make it complex" clearly got the upper hand. Adding human voices only made the electronics sound more inhuman – Yann Geslin's dismantling of Mallarmé is as poetic as a circuit diagram.

1984 saw the installation of SYTER (Synthèse or Système en Temps Réel), which allowed composers to integrate live performers into their work. Denis Dufour's *Piv De Perversion* uses synthesizers and violin, while Savouret's *La Complainte Du Bossuet* and Ramon Gonzales-Arroyo's *De La Distance* both opt for double bass. In Savouret's piece, bassist Frédéric Stohl also has to recite a text and the resulting splattery poésies sonore isn't exactly attractive. It's what Bob Ostertag complained about in his "Why Computer Music Sucks" article a while back: "The more technology is thrown at the problem, the more boring the results. People set out for new timbral horizons, get lost along the way in the writing of the code, the trouble-shooting of the systems [...] then fail to notice that the results do not justify the effort." Fortunately that can't be said of Horacio Vaggione's *Ash*, François Bayle's *Mimaméta*, or the extract from Daniel Teruggi's *Instants D'Hiver*.

The only piece of musique concrète to have been heard by millions, maybe billions, of people is Bernard Parmegiani's *Indicatif Rossy*, the instantly recognisable jingle that has been used at Charles De Gaulle airport since 1974. This opens the final disc, *Le GRM Sans Le Savor*, a wonderful mixed bag that also includes Bayle's 1970 explorations with Robert Wyatt and Kevin Ayers, a five-movement suite extracted from Robert Cohen-Solal's incidental music for the cult TV series *Les Shaolots* and Boris Vian's *L'Alcool Tue* (1962), which Parmegiani turns into a cartoon cut-up worthy of John Zorn. Though the disc actually ends with Christian Zanési's sonar RAMP, another doodle instantly familiar to anyone who's ever taken the Métro, the last substantial piece on offer is Parmegiani's *La Roue Ferris* (1971), which, if you'll forgive the pun, is a great way to go out on a high. □

**AVARUS**  
RUSKEATIMANTTI  
TUMULT 2XCD  
BY JIM HOPKINS

Avarus are one of many mercurial ensembles hailing from the Finnish underground that hybridize DJ musical forms out of psychedelia, free jazz, electroacoustics, Indian ragas, and gamelans. As is the case in other projects such as Kerafakti, Nihilisti, and The Asakemondros, who both share members with Avarus, this ensemble would be happening whether or not anybody was listening or interested.

While their primal rhythmic structures and angular acoustic guitar melodies, Avarus celebrate their own self-sufficiency through an eccentric sensibility that is refreshingly devoid of all irony. On *Ruskeatimantti* — a two-disc collection of long out of print CD-Rs, singles, and cassettes — these seldom neo-freaks refuse to polish their unwieldy talents. Their primitive songs hold a spare rhythmic sensibility of simple hand drums and clattering found objects, which act as the foundation of their freemoving soundscapes with almost every instrument imaginable.

It-lashed guitars roost on sharp guitar riffs caught in locked grooves, cheap synthesizers rumble along a webby orbit of atonal drones, and tripe penny whistles randomly teleport through the scales. Given that Avarus adhere to the Finnishness recording method of dropping a mic in the room and closing the door, all of Avarus's sound flows with a raspy ease, empathetically communicating a revolving door of emotional states from madcap and melancholy to dourly and obese, to jubilant and ecstatic.

Where the first disc of *Ruskeatimantti* sees Avarus fragmenting their recording sessions into concise nuggets, the second expands into sprawling drone rock epics. Particularly on the jawdropping live recording "X-V-P", the Finns concoct a slurry of post-Comrad/Cale monotone dissonance and giddy amplifier feedback. Even when they tumble down the staircase of free jazz with stumpled percussion and bleating horns, Avarus fill every rock and cavity with this minimalist, as psychedelically shamanic as anything, thrumming and mind altering as vintage Swedish out rockers Pajunen Sound and The Sex City Girls at their most hypnotic.

**BEYOND SENSORY  
EXPERIENCE**  
CORRELATIONS  
OLD EUROPE CAFE CD  
BY COLIN BUTTIMER

*Correlations* presents interpretations by fellow travelers of Beyond Sensory Experience's 2004 trilogy (*Jortone*, *Urmale* and *Ratan*), as well as alternative takes by the Swedish Dark Ambient duo themselves. The image projected by practitioners of this sort of music can appear fairly ridiculous to outsiders. However, BSE's appropriation of surgical and military diagrams, which they subsequently label with mysterious Latin references, masks them a cut above the generic norm.

The "two-face Problem" interpreted by Alexos compacts a sonic cross-section of fume into raw rising, ascending movement. Doskaka's version of "Urmale" is ushered in by pitchbent wails that follow languorously over sonorous guitar soundscapes. Later, the impressive thrust of the felt-muffled plectrover that impels "Inside

Erasmus's Bed" forward may prompt nervous glances at the door. *Correlations* ends on a high note with Alexo's deliciously noisy "11.28.9.11.9", which applies a buzzsaw to the listener's creases and takes an impressive nine minutes to cut through the cerebral cortex and cerebellum before finally severing the spinal cord.

With the notable exception of "Inside Erasmus's Bed", the occasional beats are the wisest element of the proceedings, the lowering atmospheric and resonant samples the strongest. Something about the music's gloom is strangely comforting — perhaps it's the knowledge that immersion in it need only be temporary. The duo's homepage is graced by an ad banner whose links lead to a Swedish lifestyle magazine, replete with the usual pictures of Hollywood stars, reality and so on. The proximity of such banality to their thematic references to the science of rhythm, medieval illustrations and apocalyptic messages is strangely appropriate.

Whether the contrast is deliberate or the result of inconsideration is open to question, but their juxtaposition emphasizes the potential remedial power of Beyond Sensory Experience's work.

**CHRIS BROWN**  
TALKING DRUM  
POGUS CD  
BY JULIAN COWLEY

Chris Brown, who studied with Gordon Mumma and David Rosenbom, is co-director of the Center for Contemporary Music at Mills College, Oakland. He is also an improvising pianist in Glenn Spearman's Double Two and co-founder of the electroacoustic group Room, and co-founder of computer network music ensemble The Hub. Interested in how music can change our experience of space, he used tiny microphones fixed to sunglasses near his ears to make recordings during the 1990s that dramatically conveyed aspects of the experience of physical movement through fields of densely compounded or shimmering sound. As his immersion in peripatetic listening evolved, he was struck by what that polyphonic music, with its plural centers of interest, enables listeners to shift focus and find their own trajectories within its constituent layers.

Brown decided to use computer instruments to bring together these two strands of research. A shifting cast of improvisers, including trumpeter Wadada Leo Smith and percussionist Willem Wiernt, have interacted with installations of networked laptops, programmed to explore cyclical polyrhythms, to realize *Talking Drum* in a variety of locations. Audiences have been invited to wander freely and arrive at their own personal mix. This release compiles excerpts from performances, recorded with binaural microphones in America, Canada and Holland between 1994-99. They've been blended with some of those environmental deconstructionist and global music recordings — including Cuban dance rhythms and a Balinese ceremonial ceremony — which inspired the whole project.

Brown's editing of disparate elements has produced a smoothly continuous piece that can carry you with it while remaining sufficiently casual to allow the attention to roam around its daring compilation of rhythmic cycles. It's a yeasty mixture of Afro-Latin celebration, pulsing synthesizers, gamelan, HipHop samples, street

noise, jazz group, children's chatter, fireworks, birdsong and much else besides. Headphones are advocated and add a dimension, but it works very well through loudspeakers too.

*Talking Drum* is subtitled "Binaural motion recordings composed as a dialogue of distances". Its success confirms and refines a crucial point established long before its enabling technologies were conceived, that rhythm is in the motion of the bodies.

**C-SCHULZ**  
5 FLUCKER TUNES  
SONIC CD  
BY KEN HOLLINGS

Tunes that flicker, it should be noted at the start, are rarely tunes at all. At best they are a disorienting ephemerality — at worst an effect. Film maker and composer Carsten Schulz's first solo release since 1992's 4 Film Rue for Austria's Extreme label breaks sound down to its rawest oscillations. A single vibration seems to expand itself throughout all eight of its compositions, its gradually accumulated power taking the listener from one place on the net.

The clearest statement of this intent can be found on "Flicker", produced at the studios of Westdeutscher Rundfunk in Cologne and featuring Andrius from Mouse On Mars on guitar. The back shudders and quakes intently suggesting intense activity but little progress, release or motion. Whatever lively structures or harmonic lines the work might evoke are all exposed as mere illusion. What we choose to hear as music is based entirely on how the most basic pulsation is perceived. What remains is a subtle intellectual game played upon the listener, where an auditory equivalent of a flick-book gives the approximation of a simple movement.

Perhaps it's not so surprising, therefore, to find the sound of a helicopter's rotor blades slicing through the air incorporated skillfully into the gently accelerated shimmering of "Gastemon" or an elegantly protected burst of feedback emerging from the deep bass swell and the howling of Kornelia Bittmann's violin on "Widens". Once again C-Schulz has displayed an astonishing capacity for taking his time. The result is a thoughtful, engaging sequence which can easily withstand repeated listening.

**CALIFORNIA DOLLS**  
DRAGON, TIGER AND  
ESCARGOT  
COMMUNE DISC CD  
BY PAUL HODD

The prolific CD-R label Commune Disc has charted the various currents of Japanese electronic and electroacoustic music with lightning quick releases for several years now. This release is the first album proper from Tokyo's California Dolls, the duo of Ami Yoshida and Daisuke Wada. Yoshida is best known for her vocal line in the duos Astro Teen (with Utoh Kawasaki) and Cosmos (with Sachiko Mi).

Don't expect the tame, genial impressions of these groundbreaking vets here though — this CD is a collection of idiosyncratic 1980s favoured avant pop songs. Music, songwriting and vocal styles are shared evenly, as is the operation of various samplers, drum machines and keyboards. The first moving and severely varied disc has a strange and childlike exuberance — the first third of the album



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includes a genuine pop song, purky lo-fi electro under syncretic attack and queasy drum 'n' bass with off-key voices.

This all gives way to "Aukia (No Rose)," a mysterious and intimate mood piece created with elements of Yoshida's howling voice technique and an effective keyboard figure. "Lastborn" is a march, with Am's wayward Technics deck trading fours with Chihara's vocal. Elsewhere Yoshida's instrumental "Xis Expanse" features distorted beats collapsing under heavy feedback. A gritty live track is underpinned by what sounds like a steam-powered drum machine and a spoken text from Cheyenne describing a young man's internal dialogue of doubt and a dream of a traumatic sea voyage.

It's notable that many of the improvising artists that have emerged from Tokyo since the late 90s have also successfully expressed other musical interests. Colleagues like Tatu: Akayama with his hard rock/minimalist beanie or Iku Uemori's melodic film scores spring to mind. Both born in 1976, California Dells are unconsciously working with the 80s/90s music they've grown up with.

Embracing a playfulness and imagination reflected by the fantasy portrait cover artwork from cut anime illustrator Katsuya Terada and inescapable felt tip imaginary landscape work by Kansas artist Makiko Yamamoto, California Dells blend various disparate popular and avant elements into a confident and unusual whole.

## CHEVRON EVERYTHING'S EXACTLY THE SAME

PLANET MU CD

BY SUSANNA GLASER

Chevron, aka Brighton based lepto manipulator Jonathan Valentine, wears his heart on his sleeve. Releasing his Planet Mu debut on Valentine's Day is only the beginning. The love in this album also extends to toys (he's created his own toy instrument which he wields at gigs, a reggie-like contraption dubbed Regga Weapon 2), computer games (from which he plunders many sounds), Kraftwerk (homage) and Kate Bush (reversion).

His is a chaotic free-to-love enthusiasm for anything and everything, with the CD veering from traditional pop to reconstructed reggae to oblique otherworlds in a belching best. Yet, the cohesiveness of the album isn't lost, instead it becomes part of his gig, a unifying thread of chaos, the ghost in the machine run not.

In opener "Swimmer Lessons," shiny bubbles

of manufactured joy fade to the dissonant, cunch of bastard beats and slinky strings. So, to cut breakneck dizziness. But with "Running Out Of Time," Chevron takes us through a different window, where plastic harps, artificial string melancholia and false organs trick us into happy memories only to be crushed with the pseudo-horn soundtrack of early Jung's apocalyptic alien noise. There are more otherworldly moments, like the rhythmic outer space hum of "Bathyscape," and more earthly moments, as on the paranoid "Lander," where the choice rubble of radio disturbing noise is utterly cold. No chords, no melody, just an incessant volume cut short for dramatic effect. His bark is worse than his bite. Like Mouse On Mars, Chevron's reggae is essentially playful. So Kraftwerk is twisted into a two-step frag, while "Rude the Techno Pioneer" melds "Jungle Bells" and "We Wish You A Merry Christmas" with sassa-addict tonkiness.

There are also many exquisitely great moments: "Optic Realisation" drenches the listener with magnified Pearl & Dean synths, while the delicious melancholia of "Emails And Viruses" features Kate Bush's "Don't Give Up" alongside other disparate fragments that join together early well. Compared to the violent breakcore of Isabella Venetian Scenes, everything's *Dracolye*. The Same is eminently saneable.

## CIRCLE EMPIRE WOT SEASON LP GUILLOTINE

BY DAVID KEDMAN

Long before the current groundswell, Circle were the first underground group to put Finland on the map since Tampere SS terminated their mission somewhere around the mid-80s. Their initial strategy was mind-numbingly beautiful: marrying shamanic Metal with flattened boogie and trance-inducing minimalism to generate new Cro-Magnon highs. Love they were always a blast, riding eternally peaking riffs like no one other than Spicemen 3, but their recorded work never quite scaled the heights that they could generate in front of hordes of receptive skulls.

Empire, a new LP featuring two side-long tracks, is a case in point. The A side, "Digger," bursts into life with a cloud of synthy modern cross-eyed electro classic in the manner of Klaus Schulze's electro classic, black Dance. Vocalist Mika Rantala's prophetic improvised tongues speak

of unexplored frontiers of teenage like nothing the side of Jaws Priest's Rod Hallford - the way they're phased and cut-up here generates all sorts of laminal action. But the threatened explosion never happens, as the whole set-up builds to nowhere, eventually resolving into a light, churring rill that recalls Kate Bush's "Don't Give Up". Over on the flip, the title track is a more straightforward and ordinary side of moody acid rock.

Guillotine is mostly made of shorter tracks and as such is even more frustrating. Most of the pieces have good idea sketches, pitch riffs launched into a half of ideas. It's almost as if the guys are so determined not to simply grab the riffs by the horns and melt it into space - a strategy that still dominates their live shows - that the tracks instead become exercises in constant deferral. The best moments here could barely be described as highlights but they inevitably involve fractious, almost-swinging jazz guitar, the kind that would look good in condense, and a vocal from Ratto that's pitched somewhere between a wine bar scat and Iron Maiden circa "Run To The Hills". At this point an elementary strategy of more force and less fuss seems exactly what's needed to break the creative deadlock.

## DAVID COULTER/ MICHAEL GIRA/ JEAN MARIE MATHOUL/ CHARLEMAGNE PALESTINE GANTSE MSHPUCHAH: MUSIC IN THREE PARTS

FRINGES CD

BY MIKE BARNES

The music for Gantse Mshpuchah was conceived and recorded "by correspondence", then mixed and presumably modified structurally by Mathoul. The result is a striking noise of a dronepiece with lots of incident and activity occurring beneath a fairly constant surface tone. There is a point in "Part # One" where the clanking metal and loud intertwining lines of instruments and found sounds (with guests including Tony Conrad on string drone and Terry Edwards on trumpet) reach an extraordinary intensity. But the most shocking moment is when someone, Gira presumably, starts strumming an acoustic guitar.

As it continues in a similar vein for over 50 minutes, this initially intriguing cacophony doesn't really engage over the duration. Gira manages to grab the attention in "Part # Two" with loops featuring snippets of Jarboe's vocals from his 1988 album *The Holy Lands*. Depending on how they are looped they sound like coughing,

laughing, sexual excitement or someone sobbing in pain. This cryptic activity clashes with some of Palestine's street recordings, making them doubly disturbing, although they are ultimately blunted by more gathering clouds of multi-textured song top.

As an exercise in detailed listening, this has an extraordinary density, especially on what sound like keyboard notes held to infinity on "Part # Two". But its very mashing and layering of activity make Gantse Mshpuchah less than satisfying. Its three lengthy pieces don't carry the punch of a pared-down drone composition. And despite the emergence of rhythmic elements and string arpeggios on "Part #3", they also lack the dynamics or harmonic impulse that would have given them some shape. Overall, Gantse Mshpuchah feels like a sonic equivalent of musing up all the colours in the paintbox and ending up with a dirty grey/brown.

## CURRITUCK CO SLEEPWALKS IN THE GARDEN OF THE DEAD ROOM

TRACK & FIELD CD

BY MIKE BARNES

Currituck Co is basically Kevin Barker, an American songwriter possessed of a lived-in voice and a spilling guitar style reminiscent of John Fahey and Nick Drake's dreaminess and strength of line. There are echoes of Bert Jansch here also, especially on "Wisdom Of The Woods", where meander and percussion loops open the door to an adventuresome, Eastern-dipped guitar eclect.

In a fairly random catch-up process, this one went into the CD tiny just vacated by a compilation featuring the best of Tim Hollier, the overlooked 80s troubadour. It's interesting to see how this intimate branch of music, which borrows from folk and pop (and Country traditions in Barker's case) has become a kind of a tradition in itself, with each generation incorporating contemporary mores into a person, timeless musical style.

Drake used orchestration to hint at some lost idyll, and Hollier's strings and brass give his fine compositions a peculiarly 60s pulse, while Barker's own take on "psychotic folk", as he describes this music, involves a chamber ensemble of violin, cello and celeste, sample loops and unfettered guitar solos, including a J Mascis-style bashing of the amp to make his reverb springs bubble before an electric blowout on "Spin On A Friday".

Barker's observational lyrics are pithy and

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finely honed, more easygoing than the hard-as-nails approach taken by the late Elliott Smith. Barker's howling style has more in common with DeWanda Barker, a regular collaborator.

"Sleepwalking" carries that heavy, youthful feeling of well, rather' doing but I'll sing about it anyway. Do "I Went Outside Today," the lines "I was your waiting tables would you take down every face, or just take down every order?" puts one in mind of the conversational/ostentatious lyrics of Simon and Garfunkel.

It's not Barker's fault that the legacy of history casts a longer shadow year by year, not really fair to saddle a young musician with so much baggage. Particularly when he is making music like this, which is fresh, original and pushes at the boundaries of established style.

## DAEDELUS EXQUISITE CORPSE

NIRVA TUNE CD

BY DEREK WADSWLEY

Despite songs called "Impending Doom" and "Deity Departed," "Sexy Body" might have been a more appropriate album title than *Exquisite Corpse*, given Daeclus's passion for sunbaked Brooklyn guitar plodders and sensual string arrangements. The album opens with breathy, chirp-like melody lullaby over crisp salsa beats before dissolving into a lush sample of John Barry's *Diamonds Are Forever* theme. It's all production fun and games here—*Exquisite Corpse* is a collage of freaky beats, pseudo-movie themes and Easy Listening that exudes an auld nostalgia for trash culture comparable to Madlib's love affair with the archives of Blue Note.

Although MCs featured include MF Doom, So and Mike Ladd, the slippery polyrhythmic music is a difficult terrain for MCs to conquer. Lyrics become incidental thought bubbles to a whimsical musical daydream unfolding in the background. Mike Ladd's "Welcome Home" is backed with deep neo-noir celloinet and wistful strings that could have come from a Douglas Sirk melodrama, adding suburban winks to Ladd's tale of a returning shell-shocked soldier: "I watch South Park, clutch the sofa, quake and tremble, welcome home." In fact there's more than one variety of nostalgic pleasure on offer—an impressive grunting 303 elsewhere harks back to rave utopias of the 90s. Smish, weightless beats caress your synapses rather than crush your chest. A heavyweight Hip-hop producer might have a recognizable boom-bap

style, much as a boxer is identified by a distinctive one-two combination. But the ultra-felicitous style of *Exquisite Corpse* is more like an elegant, and highly pleasurable, rhythmic di. ch.

## ABSENCE IMPECACIO

BY MATTHEW INGRAM

More than the Arabian axis, DJ Spooky's use of the Def Jax label, Dälek confound the stereotypes that might characterize a rap act. Yet their avant-garde Heavy Metal Hip-hop fusion was almost given a makeover in a musical cosmos populated with groups like The Disposable Heroes Of Hiphopery and The Beatnigs.

Following the extinction of such fellow creatures, Dälek are something of a rap dodo. Even so, as the MCs who collaborated with Faust, they must have set a new benchmark for the improbable.

Seeing how Dälek are quick to write up mainstream Hip-hop's "cookie-cutter beats," their own backing rhythms demand attention. Certainly on tracks like "Distorted Pose" and "In The Mold Of Struggle" the lyrics are hard to decipher, as though they were limbo poking out of the rubble. Poetic impressions are therefore fleeting and almost subliminal, revealing themes such as distrust of organized religion and anger at urban oppression. Their beats have frequently drawn comparison with the music of My Bloody Valentine, albeit with a squalidist twist. While MBV's feedback served to depict moribund utopias engulfed in a rhapsodic blizzard, Dälek's is definitely in the order of a pollutant reflecting the urban environment.

The group pretends to relish intensely negative reactions to their music, and indeed their's previous little in the way of light entertainment about Absence. The nearest thing to a hook is the (blink and you miss it) rising and falling scordized tones at the end of "Eyes To Form Shadows," and the only breaks from the testosterone madison of "Knots" and the title track are drone interludes of stately intensity.

## DAMON & NAOMI THE EARTH IS BLUE

30/30/70 CD

BY CLIVE BRILL

Their first new recorded work in five years, *The Earth Is Blue* was created by the two former Galaxie 500 members over the course of 2004 at their home studio in Cambridge, Massachusetts. It's very much a collaboration with guitarist

Michio Kurihara from the Japanese group Ghost. The relationship with Kurihara is wonderfully productive, embedding the duo's dreamy psychedelic songs into a richly layered sound that occasionally bares its teeth and threatens to turn vicious. One such moment is the close of "A Second Life," while earlier in the same song Kurihara contributes a sublime counterpoint behind Naomi's vocals, "Ueno Station," with its sad mandolin, is about a homeless community beneath the Kyoto rail terminal. There's the only shadow of time is rain." Kurihara's solo guitar adds a plaintive cry, his notes falling onto the melody like snowflakes. George Harrison's "While My Guitar Gently Weeps" is an appropriate enough cover, as an adequately and slowly, it is transformed into a daydream epic.

Damon & Naomi's gentle psych-rock approach has a timeless quality, and massages musical memory till Prozacian flashback leap out. For me, the opener "Beautiful Close Double," with its aching vocal harmonies and elegant guitar, triggered recall of Fairport Convention's 1968 *What We Did On Our Holidays*. The occasional lush fanfares are courtesy of trumpet Greg Kelley and saxophonist Bob Roney, from Boston's lower class improvisers ensemble.

*The Earth Is Blue* has a glorious, spacey innocence that inspires affection. It's a welcome work from two artists who might easily have abandoned music to focus on publishing and design (they also run the Exact Change imprint, which reports experimental literature). If so, we would have missed out on all the love packed into the title track—Kurihara's guitar leads us out of a Castano Veloso song and into an all-hold-hands psychedelic freestyle through space, over a gentle Latin beat.

## PAUL DUNMALL MOKSHA BIG BAND

I WISH YOU PEACE  
CLIMBPORE CD

## PAUL DUNMALL QUARTET LOVE, WARMTH AND COMPASSION

PMH CD

BY PHILIP CLARK

Paul Dunmall turned 50 last year, and *I Wish You Peace* was commissioned by the BBC for a 14 piece big band to celebrate his half-century. The rhythmic section of Keith Tippett (piano), Paul Rogers (bass) and Tony Levin (drums) are the same musicians who work with Dunmall in the improviser quartet Mujica. Second drummer

Mark Sanders and guitarist Phil Gibbs make up Dunmall's working trio. John Adams is on second guitar and the wind section includes Paul Rutherford (trumpet) and Simon Poord (tenor saxophone). Dunmall says his intention was to channel the energies and interaction of his small groups into a big band setting. This is a tall order that he makes work beautifully.

Many similar projects have been compromised by the catch-22 of overly fussy big band scoring, straining improvisers, or improvisers smothering themselves by overworking missed beats. Dunmall's solution to this problem was to keep the textures of his big band writing deliberately unfussy, allowing the soloists plenty of space to express themselves. His own snaking lines dominate the opening section and the group deliver chorale-like harmonies with glib panache. In the middle section, he divides the 14 pieces into overlapping and interlinking chamber groups. First up is the trombone section, who produce a warm of unreeling counterpoint that floats delicately. Underneath slide the Mujica formation, with Tippett's surprisingly explicit Latin American feel registering as (tearachingly) incongruous. The lead-in tone of Dunmall's tenor playing during his solo is very impressive. *The Coltrane* influence is pervasive, but he avoids empty glistening and plays with telling inner reserve.

Like the opening, the final section again pits the soloist against orchestral textures, and now with a twist. As his big band composition progresses, Dunmall works his way towards a hearty old World War two song, a reference, he says, to the chaos being unleashed in Iraq as he was writing. Perhaps subconsciously he was also thinking how difficult it is for big bands members to ever say "we'll meet again".

The Dunmall Quartet album was recorded earlier this year during a tour that added drummer Hamid Drake to Dunmall's regular group with Phil Gibbs and Paul Rogers. Drake makes them sound more like a jazz group than an imperious outfit, especially on the second track where his steady groove helps Dunmall to push against the bar lines, rather than playing inside a regular pulse. The opening track takes time to establish itself, but then opens out into a laid, mure long structure held together by Dunmall's subtle sense of pacing and Drake's abiding and flowing grooves. Dunmall switches to the bagpipes to close, and Drake pounds out march rhythms that create the air of Celtic antiquity curiously refreshed and re-emerged.



deep listening



**RELEASES**

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NOVEMBER 2006

Bikim & Fennep  
Complementary  
Contrasts  
2003  
Gesamtsingen

NOVEMBER 2002 - NEW RELEASE

Anthony Braxton's  
Charlie Parker Project

NOVEMBER 2001

Ellery Eskelin  
Ten

NOVEMBER 2004

The Way

NOVEMBER 2005 - NEW RELEASE

Paul Taylor Unit  
Late 190s Many  
And Not Goodbye**YAMATAKA EYE & JOHN ZORN  
NANINANI II**

TZRAD CD

BY EDWIN POUNCEY

Boredoms vocalist Yamataka Eye and Toddlek lead founder John Zorn first met in Tokyo in 1986, when the saxophonist saw Eye performing in a club. In 1991 Zorn invited him to New York to take part in Naked City, a freeform rock experiment which crashed hardcore, jazz and Country into an imaginary cartoon soundtrack, fusing Zorn's diverse musical tastes and Eye's manic work with The Boredoms almost perfectly. Their relationship continued to grow when Zorn supervised The Boredoms' Wow 2 session in 1993, and later invited Eye to record *Nani Nani* with him in 1995.

One of the first releases for Zorn's fledgling TZRAD New Japan series, *Nani Nani* is an improvised collage of strange sounds and ruptured instrumentation that rekindled the spirit of the earlier Naked City sessions. Although it was less involved than Zorn's previous work as a solo performer and bandleader, or more restrained than the kind of mangi-rapped spunk that Eye punched into the early Boredoms releases, *Nani Nani* was nevertheless a fine collaboration.

On 7 September 2003 they returned to the studio to record *Naninani II* as a continuation of the ideas laid down on the first volume. Unfortunately, it comes across as an idea stretched too far. There is little here that hasn't already been stated, with Eye singing and playing a variety of instruments, electronics and found objects over Zorn's alto sax bleats and other instrumental eruptions. It's enjoyable enough, but mostly there's no heart in the music. At times it sounds as though the pair are simply trying to outdo each other by producing the strangest sounds imaginable. The communication between Zorn and Eye on *Nani Nani* is sadly lacking here, although occasionally something happens that is instantly captivating and leaves one hurrying for more.

After the almost childlike chaos of the opening "Feydustic" and "Halo Himo", "Shise Baka" drifts into like a breath of snowmelt mountain air with a libretto meant to be heard in the distance, an Ambient organ sound and vocals that bring to mind Charlemagne Palestine's tribute to his former voice coach Patrick Carr. Equally engrossing is "Fat Anarchy On Airplane" and the tender closing track "Macaribo Delicieux", which hints at the direction in which Eye was planning to take his Boredoms as Seadrum. These are exquisite but short lived moments – the mayhem returns soon after and with it the loss of direction. Hovering somewhere between artistic ecstacy and indulgence, *Naninani II* is a somewhat flawed and frustrating sequel that fails to improve upon Eye and Zorn's original and superior collaboration.

**FIELD OF SOUND  
A CROOKED HORIZON LINE**

SOUTHRANE CD

**MOBILE SOUND UNIT  
ALONE IN MOUNTING STATIC  
OF CANS**

SOUTHRANE CD

BY KEITH MOUNIE

Named by conferring the names of expressionist painter Chaim Soutine and sax colossus John

Coltore, the Soutine label has been documenting the fertile Milwaukee scene with a series of interesting releases which share a willingness to reconfigure avant rock, free improv and DIY electronics in engaging new ways. These latest albums showcase two of the ongoing musical concerns of label Lynchpin John McCoy. Mobile Sound Unit is his computer based solo project, while Field Of Sound sees him collaborating with another member of the local scene, multi-instrumentalist Jason Westberg. On *Alone In Mounting Static Of Cans*, McCoy masterfully evokes the space fusion one might have expected from Sri Mataswara/Tangerine Dream-style title. He processes samples using the Audiomulch program (which pretty much does what it says on the tin), adding uneasy HipHop influenced beats. What helps McCoy to rise above the usual clutter – or mull – of bedroom experimentalists is his musical sensitivity. Even in full crush-up mode, he never allows his work to lose its sense of purpose or focus.

Good as the solo album is, *A Crooked Horizon Line* is better still. It covers a vast array of approaches and atmospheres, from the massed bowed basses of opener "Suenenies, Spotted, Shovel", which recalls the swirling out chamber rock of Radach's or even Art Zoyd, to the intimate piano figures of the *Guster* like "2132 In Humble". As with other Soutine releases (such as last year's debut by Midlow and Castle Broadway's 2003 album *Towers And Transmissions*), the work of these Milwaukee musicians has an attractive organic quality which might lack the sophistication of the more celebrated music of their Chicago post-rock peers, but it compensates with a hearty sense of discovery and commitment to sonic adventure. McCoy's no-nonsense approach to experimental rock may well be a conscious antidote to some of the more eclectic and fanciful manoeuvres of his more illustrious neighbours, his efforts to step out of their shadow perhaps reflecting the relationship between the two cities themselves.

**BILL FRISSELL  
RICHTER B58**

SONOLINES CD

BY MIKE BARNES

Richter B58 begins explosively with guitar, violin, viola and cello producing an aural storm akin to George Crumb's *Black Angels*. This cedes to slow guitar chords by Bill Frisell, with the string players alternating long lines and quick flourishes. This is programme music but of a different kind, in that each of these eight pieces is inspired by a 1999 series of paintings by German artist Gerhard Richter, where the artist produces vivid evocative abstracts, often on aluminium. Horizontal planes of colour are produced by the paint being dragged across the surface, sometimes becoming a blur of hues and interspersed with striking white details.

There's an uncanny kinship in style between the paintings and music. Indeed, the pairing relevant to each piece can be viewed while listening via the disc's CD-ROM track. It's tempting, but ultimately misleading, to over-analyse the paintings' role as graphic scores. Frisell not only studied the series, he kept the paintings on view in the recording studio – but he kept to and stressing that there was a lot of writing and practice involved in realising Richter B58. Even if he had composed the

album after aimlessly staring out of the window, the important thing is that the music is potent in itself. It helps redress the balance of a number of well executed but rather too-humid albums in the guitarist's back catalogue.

The amount of musical activity, the swapping of themes and then fading into improvisation is at times affecting, at times harsh and unbeforging. Frisell's own plangent guitar lines and electronics add a peculiar textual quality to the string trio, often subtly colouring in the background as on "B58-4". Some pieces evoke the chamber works of Martin Feldman, but with intentions that recall Berg and Liszt and Mahler.

"B58-3" is the most lyrical track. Here violinist Jerry Schleimer and viola player Eyvind Kjord perform a melody pitched somewhere between Debussy and Haydn, over which Frisell scatters some sparsely chord work before Hank Roberts's cello comes in underneath, digging its way through the musical foundations. That activity soon dissipates and the piece moves to a stately conclusion. The multi-valency activity of "B58-7" directs the listener to what looks, to the mind's eye, like the sun shining around the edges of a vast skyful of storm clouds. Not much to do with Richter's work, but, by the end of the record, Frisell has created masterful images beyond these particular paintings.

**HENRY GRIMES TRIO  
LIVE AT THE KERAVA JAZZ  
FESTIVAL**

ATYLER CD

BY PHIL FREEMAN

Bass player Henry Grimes is back, and he's got saxophonist David Murray and drummer Hamid Drake with him. To properly appreciate this record, it's necessary to dispense with sentimentality – a difficult task for jazz fans. Nice to have Grimes back not because he's old and caddy but because he's a powerful bassist with impressive technique and a highly individualistic style – the two basic components of jazz excellence.

The show begins with two long pieces, and ends with two short ones. All four meander, but meandering is the nature of saxophone solos. Drake never lets the music flag. A power player who swings harder than anyone since the late Ed Blackwell, he tosses his bandmates a drum roll or a tempo change to regain their attention whenever they seem to be getting lost. Murray clearly feeds the line-up a tempting opportunity to overplay (Grimes played with Albert Ayler, after all), and he indulges himself a bit. There are plenty of compelling moments, though.

Derek Bailey has warned that improv CDs should be listened to once, then thrown away. That's taking things a bit far, but there is a performance to a recording of a live performance, to which that advice might apply, and a live album, which is edited and paced for home listening. Though it's worth keeping, this obviously unedited disc still falls into the former category.

**GUM  
VINYL ANTHOLOGY**

2004VE 28CD

BY KEITH MOUNIE

1980s Australia seems to have been a hotbed of visionary DIY experimentation in addition to spawning the familiar Antipodean Gothic of The

Moodists, Grime & The City Sokuken, etc. With their fondness for bizarre tape loops, analogue abuse and wild video work, Tom Ellard's Sewered Heads had an international impact, their early work connecting with the industrial scene of Cabaret Voltaire and SPK, and the blossoming lo-fi experimental movement of Noise With Wound et al. Though Gum didn't make any such splash at the time, this compilation shows their contemporaneous work to be similarly interesting and innovative.

The collection consists of their two albums (1987's *Vinyl* and the following year's *20 Years in Blue Movies and Unmet to Fake An Dragons*) along with EP tracks and unreleased material. Setting on stark vinyl as their main sound source, their work echoing that of Christian Marclay and prefiguring that of Philip Jack. Gun sound remarkably contemporary. The outtakes are particularly good. The promo montage "1-800-GUN" sidesteps punnily by the deftness of its musical logic. "TV Eye," a Distinctly Unsettling collaboration with the *TV Eye* series, is a minor territory to the latter mapped so thoroughly by Oromo Yoshida. Best of all is the romp through Tomoshige Grestia's "Blood On The Floor" featured on *20 Years*, a version so blunt and rugged that you'll be spitting out teeth for hours afterwards.

Jewelline finds this collection may be Gurn's Philip Smeratos and Andrew Curtis have gone on to produce interesting work in sound art and photography respectively), there's enough music here to engage on its own terms rather than for the conceptual implications of the process. Gurn never subscribed to the banal thematic glossiness that it was the industrialists' stock in trade. The collection is a testament to their art, advertisement and honesty, to their purity, stating: "This exclamation with the tactile nature of sound that radiates so strongly through this highly entertaining document."

**HARMONIC 33**  
MUSIC FOR FILM, TELEVISION  
AND RADIO VOL 1

BY MATTHEW INGRAM

The growth of interest in library recordings – copyright-free music designed for television companies – has been slow but sure. Original interest came from dance music producers seeking breaks to feed samplers. However, further exploration has led many producers to develop a deep affection for the genre. While the original music may never be politically engaged or culturally vibrant, its 'abandoned atmospheres' can enchant through the recontextualisation effected by the passing of time.

Harmonic 33 is the brainchild of Mark Pritchard, formerly of Relaxed and Global Communication, and might be grouped with Jerry Trunk and outfits like The Focus Group under the makeshift moniker of New Library. Rather than planking the borrowed glamour of classic soundtracks, these artists retish the sonic bourgeoisie jazz acts that characterize library music. Surprisingly for an artist with roots in Techno, Music for Film, Television And Radio M4T is closer in spirit to the Cinematic Orchestra's big band Axiom novel, eschewing sampling for a score played with real instruments. Pritchard and his collaborator Dove Binkworth aren't blessed with the musicianship of an Ennio Morricone and use a few tracks

might be slightly lead-footed. But in terms of fidelity, their interpretations are outstanding.

This is laid down to their choice of instruments: the amplified hapschord of "Marenco", the overcast lute of "Shadow" (signaling every post-Lalo Schiffrin spy movie trope) and the fulsome analogue bleeps of "Space Travels". The timespan covered is that of the 60s and 70s, veering ever so slightly from aping the catalogues of KPM and Chappell towards those of Bruton on the early 80s-style "Funky Duck", with its lazy vintage fairlight synths. It's arguable that *Music For Film*, television and Radio 4's 13cues soundtrack and it may end up reflecting times when public resistance appears futile and a quiet personal politics might be in order.

**HIGH ON FIRE**  
**BLESSED BLACK WINGS**

RELAPSE CD  
BY EDWIN POUNCEY

High On Fire arose from the embers of Sleep, the now legendary stoner Metal group. In the summer of 1998, six months after the group had split, guitarist Matt Pike teamed up with fellow guitarist George Rice and drummer Des Kensel to form High On Fire, a power trio whose sound was triggered by Black Sabbath and Celtic Frost. They have since developed into a raging powerhouse which went on to successfully tour and record two impressive albums.

But the Art Of Self Defense (1999) and *Survived By Thieves* (2001) put to rest Mike's extended slow motion guitar routines that dominated his shows with Sleep. Rice (switching to bass) and Kessel (who has finally forsaken) in their playing. Four years on, High Dn Flv have changed and improved upon their sound considerably. After replacing the departing Rice with Melvins' (Sunshine Dill) bass guitarist, the band have the time to develop a more intricate, slower, slower sound than their third album *Blessed Chicks*. Allen's presence has added an extra kick, and any loose bolts rattling around inside HD's mighty rock engine have been vigorously elid and tightened up.

The album takes off with Kessel's muscular drum tap opening for "Devolution," a thunderous beating of percussive hammers' hammers that meets the rest of the growl speeding the other way. The song is an explosion of total power, with all three players interlocking perfectly. The first three songs are in typical industrial style, with the torments of HD's solid rock torments.

Elsewhere, "Cometh Down Hessian" is a prime example of the trio's instrumental power and imagination, as Kersel and Preston's atmospheric stomping ballbeat is suddenly set aflame with Pike's incendiary guitar flames, which temporarily light up the crushing bleakness of the song. Blessed Black Wings releases such shattering and demands that the mood be heard as a whole by cutting out the track sequencing, a device which perhaps rods in the direction of Sleep's one-song. Dopesmoker. In other words, it demands to be heard as a body of work rather than a randomly picked collection of songs. For *8BW* is an album of epic proportions and experimentation that magically welds together in a compacted Metal ball of potent energy that refuses to stop once it starts rolling.

**KAZUO IMAI**  
FAR AND WEE  
RSE CD

SHUICHI CHINO &  
KAZUO IMAI  
00111

BY BYRON COLEY

Because his recorded legacy is so scanty, guitarist Kazuo Inui remains a figure more often noted for his connections than his playing. A member of The East Themic Symphony, the sole graduate of Misayagi Takayanagi's private music academy, adjunct member of The Taj Mahal Toweles and also The New Direction Unit... it is impossible to imagine more exciting underground credentials. Yet, because he feared being seen as merely an acolyte of Takayanagi and Taj Mahal's Isaharu Kosugi, Inui shied away from playing guitar at all, especially from playing guitar in public. His has changed over the past 20 years, but he remains somewhat less than Thurston Moore-like in his approach to public performing, several interesting collaborations have been released, and his first solo CD, *How Much We Change?* earned the heads of those who heard it.

One of the most striking points on that debut was an epic of deranged electric guitar. Not surprisingly, for his second solo CD, the guitarist has chosen to record exclusively with a nylon string acoustic. It's a great choice. The instrument's limited sonic palette always makes improvisers reach deep into themselves, especially in an extended solo format. And *Far And Wide* is a splendidly successful effort, perhaps my favourite solo album since Eugene Chadbourne's *Solo Acoustic Guitar Volume Two* (1986). Like Chadbourne, Imai has a wonderful way of tuning the guitar's internal dynamics to his playing. Nylon strings have a kind of harmonic quality that is at great odds with the extreme external orientation most guitarists favour. But the richness of the string's persuasive characteristics and their general lushness are taken to joyful limits here.

Scrambling clusters of notes tug themselves through darkness, satisfied to shimmer as duty as coal. String gestures pile up like pyramids of loose stone. And on the fourth track there is something very much like an explosion in a shingle factory. There are no attempts to force the sounds to become something shimmering, something they are not. The plucking and placement are choice, powerful and sure.

may also appear on a disc recording with pianist Shaochi Chino. The latter may be best known for his membership in the Rock In Opposition inspired group Who-He-Ho, but he has recorded and performed extensively as an improviser. The lovely acoustic duos documented on *001113* were recorded in 2000 and originally released on a private CD-R. Chino's playing is spacious, with some similarities to the most diffuse early TDS work of Burton Greene and Michael Smith. He plays small lines that feel like cut d' sacs, and keen moans, following the piano into any alleyway there are many striking passages, where the keys and who's strong plunge into the darkness, and the piano's pumping, smould in the sunlight again. *001113* is a great and very friendly set, intellectually and aesthetically rewarding without being too abstract.



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**NEIL ROLNICK:  
SHADOW QUARTET**

new record from the master of music and technology with guests Elton, Joan, LA Bureaux, and Quartet of the Americas



**ANTARES ENSEMBLE:  
ECLIPSE**

the first release from one of the brightest up and comers of the US scene. The Chicago Tribune says "powerful virtuosity and stirring jazz—sharp ensemble playing"



**CAREL THOMAS:  
SOUND WINDOW(r) v**

Like a Gospel Holy Roller Party



**MARK APPLEBAUM:  
DISCIPLINE**

yet another exciting release from one of the hardest working men in show biz



the label of the American Composers Forum

One would like to think that this pair of discs means that line is going to be a more subtle presence from here on out. But even if he only releases one solo CD every ten years, as long as they're of this calibre, who are we to gripe?

**KONK PACK  
OFF LEASH**

GRAND SLAM

BY CLIVE BELL

Tim Hodgkinson, Thomas Lehn and Roger Turner, aka Konk Pack, wrangle an engrossing 45 minutes of live improvisation, crisply recorded at Utrecht's Rijnstreek Festival in June 2001. Never less than compact, Konk Pack's skronk 'n' fack make for a dense audio tussle in which Turner's lit and junk percussion in particular maintain a fierce voracity. Lehn's analogue synths, spluttering to the surface or diving like tidal wallabies, are restrained by comparison. Hodgkinson is credited with top steel guitar and clarinet, but sounds the most oblique and unrecognisable. I spotted maybe one clarinet note, but Konk Pack flocks free of instrumental associations, while not sounding much like electronic mass effect. They opt for a brooding abstraction, performed with gusto and a degree of wit, but within a spontaneous choreography of light group movement. Whorealing like a flock of birds, they all get lost together, unleashing a sudden blizzard of noise or a galloping charge of semi-rhythmic racket. No one goes off on a solo statement, but all stay on-message with a unanimity that would do a political party proud.

Konk Pack's intensity from ecstatic tapdance one minute to bubbling rages the next, is impressive and passionate. Of course this voracity, or "gabiness" as Radu Malfatti has labelled it, has sparked a reaction among many younger improvisers. The new, tight-lipped restraint now hovers at improvisation's edge is a questioning of the conventions and etiquette of this approach: the holler woe or ban on silence, the avoidance of repetition, the quick response from player to player, the unbroken 45 minute set list. But Konk Pack's pulsar polyphony is strong to shatter the beauty from ugliness. A group with a similar agenda is Bark! (Rico Caswell, Philip Muller and Paul Obermayer), and their excellent Swing, recorded in 1999 for Ernie Prevost's Matchless label, is a close cousin to Off Leash.

**LUNZ  
REINTERPRETATIONS**

GRAND SLAM

BY LOUISE GRAY

It's now nearly three years since Hans-Joachim Roedelius and Tim Story did their elegant little instrumental album, Out into the world; high time, then, for an auditory album of remixes – or in this case, reinterpretations. Either way, a delicate balancing is needed. At their most banal, remixes are simply the remodelling of source material in the remixer's image. Reinterpretation – a process which, by necessity, requires that the original language was understood – is a quite different. Lunz (the name comes from a lake in Roedelius's native Austria) are happy, too, to play listeners to take an active role in the reinterpretation game.

The two 12-track CDs – one is the duo's original 2002 release – are only subtly differentiated, so it's easy to mistake the reinterpretations disc for Lunz's original, and, when done, all errors become

iluminating. Hearing Akheim's thrumming, buzzing version of "Under Mars We Were" and then Lunz's languid piano-and-effects original is to experience two extremes. Certainly Roedelius and Story's track is sparse, languid, open, in comparison. Some have spoken of Lunz's original album as a latter-day version of Debussy's *Études*. This is not exactly so (for starters, one feels that Lunz are more interested in effective surfaces than deep structures), although there is a superficial similarity in the cool, clear and happily undramatic progress of the music. It's surprising, then, that many of the reinterpretations have taken a musing drama as their impetus. In this, one of the best – if not the best – is Milena (sic) Nade's remix of "Carnicel And Pocketboat". There's a fazing dynamism to Mathias Neuhäuser and Michael Melis's approach, and a sense of narrative that counterpoints the original's sensuousness.

Alternatively, some have tried to add voices: Half Cousin's "Dev Climbs" keeps to the spirit of Lunz's original with vocals from an unknown with a strong affinity for Robert Wyatt. There are some misses – Alucina should ditch the Clannad CDs, and Taci Tempore should learn to get to the point in its skittering piano on "Murmuring Mermaids" plumes unappealing depths. But all in all, this is a quietly thoughtful project.

**MAELSTRÖM  
IMPROVISATION**

KICKINOT CD

BY DAN WARBURTON

North eastern France, scarred physically by the remains of heavy industry and emotionally by the memory of the trenches, has long been a fertile breeding ground for what the French like to call free rock, a raucous and noisy strain of improvised music heavy on guitars and drums. In the small but serious world of French Improv, the Nancy based Soixante Étages collective and its offspin power the Égare 34, with Daniel Kaskowicz on drums, Olivier Paquette on bass and Dominique Ribault on guitar, have arguably had a greater influence on younger improvisers than marvellous individuals like Jac Bercaud and Michel Doneda. On the rather unimaginatively titled *Improvisator* by the aptly named Maelström, Paquette – on furious, snarling form throughout – is joined by Michel Dury on drums and Jean-Philippe Gross on miking beard and amplified drums.

The three brief tracks showcasing their individual talents aren't much to write home about, but together on the other nine they serve up the tazziest downhome brawny since the last Flying Luttenbachers outing. Gross's work might seem buried behind the awesomely muscular rhythm team of Paquette and Dury but it's the cement holding the wall of sound together. Even at high volume, Gross remains a highly responsive player – witness his only other available release, *Afternoon Ride*, with Alexandre Belenger on his ARR CD-R label.

Belenger and Armand Rivière also play guitar and drums, but in baby Mo, Belenger concentrates on his turntables and Rivière on a maling board customised with rods and wires like something from Mad Max 2 – and sounding just as vicious. The third member of the trio, Milo, sits demurely behind her assorted four-track

recorders, samples and rhythm boxes and unleashes a torrent of noise. Though the trio have performed throughout France since they formed in 2000, and have collaborated with the likes of alt guitar hero Jean-François Paves and local noise guru Mahayana Mudra, *Adventures* is only the second official baby Mo release.

Bringing together live and studio recordings, it's as odd and unbalancing as the bug-eyed fantasy creature that adorns the LP cover. Belenger's turnbrawl is rough and grungy – Kurt Cobain and Otis Yashkiv are heroes, and it shows – but as honest as the milk-white vinyl, and helps make this one of the freshest French improv outings of recent times.

**JO MALLANDER  
MORE TIME: HITS AND VARIATIONS 1968-1970**

ANEMA CD

BY KEN HOLLINGS

"If these pieces are possible as music," writes Finnish artist, critic and gallery owner Jan-Olof Mallander in the brief preface that accompanies the timely release of his complete solo sound works, "try them as objects." Mallander's interest in conceptual art led him to become a highly influential Finnish connection in the Fluxus network during the late 60s and early 70s, establishing him as a key figure in the country's artistic underground. Aside from organizing shows by artists who had been rejected by established galleries, promoting vegetarianism and alternative lifestyles, Mallander was also part of the notorious music collective Spier, whose lead singer spent some time in jail for having sex with a woman on top of a grand piano during a performance.

Mallander's own recorded works show an equally interventionist spirit in their shy mix of conceptual playfulness and raw minimalist aesthetics. Closing in at just north of half an hour in their entirety, his vinyl releases display a complexity that belies their brevity. There's a lot more going on here than a needle fitting a groove. His 1968 debut release, *Extended Play*, also known simply as *Kolkoloren*, is a loopee recording of a performance by Urho Kalevi Kolkoren, who was elected president of Finland in 1956 and would remain in office for the next 25 years. The delecting repetition of his name extending over two six minute sequences, entitled "1962" and "1968" respectively, still makes a powerful point in an age when Bush is hunkering down for his second term in office while Blair gets ready to gladiate his way to a possible third.

Decompositions, first released on the legendary Love label in 1970, is a tart selection of six tracks in which an unidentified selection of recordings are scratched, warped, added and jerked about in a precise Artistot manner. Aight to this the previously unreleased sound collage "In Reality", in which various renditions of the Cole Porter standard "I've Got You Under My Spell" are pitted against each other, plus your speciality yawncore selections by Left Egidio, and you've got yourself a retrospective variety of the name.

**THE NECKS  
MOSQUITO/SEE THROUGH**

REX CD

BY DAVID STUBBS

Those acquainted with Australia's The Necks will know that, despite their relatively tonal tendencies, their modus operandi is unique –

taking a single musical idea, mulling it over endlessly, shading, embellishing and elaborating on it but never breaking away from it, for anything up to an hour. Their audacious approach has been compared to a long haul fight, albeit one with enough subtle variations on their theme to sustain the listener's interest better than the average in-flight magazine on the old spot of turbulence. The only snag is that the original piece provides you cold (as 2003's *Drive By* did), then the entire album is a write-off. It, however, it does, as on the supremely sleek *Hanging Gardens*, then a mere 60 minutes less like you've been short-changed.

"Mosquito" and "See through" both clock in typically at around the hour mark and are among the Necks recordings you actually would go back to resound from a house fire. "Mosquito" begins with tricky recurrences of woodblocks and hopping clusters of piano. These are overlaid but refuse to give way to, an irregular bass pulse dotting the soundscape and a further overlay of piano, playing out an indeterminate course note by note. Further increments to the sound insulate themselves as you unware, fading in and out internally.

"See through" is a new development in the Necks' methods. Rusty percussion and luminant keyboard tinkling combine into a sustained, immobile motion of jazz stasis. This periodically submerges into silences that punctuate the recording, often for minutes at a time, before the track's central motif bobs to the surface again, cleansed but also drenched and marginally altered. It's a new variation on The Necks' "The Same/Not The Same" synthesis.

## HARRIS NEWMAN ACCIDENTS WITH NATURE AND EACH OTHER STRANGE ATTRACTORS AUDIO HOUSE CD BY DAVID KEEHAN

The critical consensus on Montreal based steel string guitarist Harris Newman's debut CD, 2003's *Not Sentinels*, was that it showcased a nascent stylist with little of the economic bent and voracious ability of heavy-hitting post-Faney players like Jack Rose, Glenn Jones and Matthew Valentine. However its follow-up, *Accidents With Nature And Each Other*, is a different bag entirely. Here Newman unravels the rudimentary basics of his technique into some beautifully hypnotic spells, combining tough solo concepts and in the mode of John Fahey with some group-think in a few deeply psychedelic tone poems.

Newman's core approach is based around working repeating single note patterns into accumulative potent forms, achieving each composition with an implied undercurrent of drone. At points here, his writing is as evocative as great jazz compositions like "Joe Kirby Blues" – second track "Cloud City" has the same complex array of attempted emotional neutrality still overwhelmed by poignant memories – while at others he stases outside of the canon altogether. "It's A Trip (Part 1)" works long string tones into a phased devotional mass that sounds like something from Popol Vuh's *Assimila Mastro*, while the closing "Driving All Night With Only My Mind" adds some subtle swing touches to Godspeed You! Black Emperor member Bruce Cawdon's brush and godspeeder work. Indeed, the addition of Cawdon provides a clutch of the record's

highlights, especially on "Lords & Ladies", where his drumming helps melt morose German rock and American primitive guitar in a way that's as evocative as R.D. Sack's pioneering work. Newman really plays the hell out of his guitar here and his approach has taken such a massive leap, both technically and conceptually, that it's amazing to baffle any latent accusations of glibbing or opportunism out of the water for good. This is the real deal.

## BJ NILSEN FADE TO WHITE TOUCH CD BY COUN BUTTIMER

A sound like distant transport contains pounded by rubber mallets is succeeded by a single, wavering note that's increasingly underscored by dense, vibrating undertones. The effect is tensely majestic, as if a long were standing on a cliff as it disintegrates into a stormy sea far below. The structural simplicity of this ten minute piece, called "Purple Phase", combined with its tectonic detail and keening pitch makes for an impressive experience comparable to surviving a dramatic coastal landscape at night. Fade To White is Swedish artist Bjørn Nilsen's first release since last year's rather lively *Live At Konzerthaus Wien*. It continues a fascination for environmental soundscapes but, unlike its predecessors, breaks proceedings into six tracks that range in duration between five and 15 minutes.

Each piece was recorded in open spaces around Central Europe before being digitally remixed and arranged. "Deed Reckoning" is denser and muddier than "Purple Phase". It scuttles and scrapes at the eardrums as if trying to scour away an accumulated residue that might otherwise prevent its assimilation. Beneath the chilly vapours and surface scene of "Let Me Know When It's Over", a tumbling piano motif can be heard, while parts of "Grosse Pölar" are comprised of legions of potest postures. At least this is the impression momentarily conjured by Nilsen's serene sculpting, but the shapes seem in clouds, the sunbeams and piano are an association of the mind whose reality is difficult to verify. These soundscapes mirror the strange intersections of nature and man-made worlds in lengthy brooding passages that accrue into moments of elegant grandeur.

## KEVIN NORTON/JOËLLE LEANDRE/TOMAS ULRICH OCEAN OF EARTH BARKING HOOB CD

## KEVIN NORTON'S BAUHAUS QUARTET TIME-SPACE MODULATOR BARKING HOOB CD

BY BRIAN MORTON

Kevin Norton is still less known as a member of one of Anthony Braxton's most successful recent groups. Indeed, the vibraphonist/percussionist's Barking Hoob catalogue has so far been dominated by Braxton material. The saxophonist is featured on the fine label debut *For Guy Debord* while Norton and wife Haeleem Min have also recorded a disc of Braxton compositions. What's immediately striking about his vibraphonist's career to date is how comfortably he has managed to combine free playing, interpretation of advanced structures and jazz repertoire.

These two records, the first of which has been around for some time, show off those contrasting aspects of his work. The trio with Léandre and Ulrich is best heard as a continuous series, though it consists of many short improvisations. The percussion solo "For Eric B", one of the longer items, shows how thoughtful and inventive a maker player Norton is, delicate calligraphies that pack a more powerful punch than their spare outlines might suggest. (Was advice in the notes to play the CD loud? It rocks.) The bassist/singer is at her wise and wonderful best, sparking out big wobbly chords at one moment, chattering like a trochaea in the shadow of the gullestream the next. It's an immensely good-natured session and the empathy between Norton and friend and neighbour Ulrich – one of the few really compelling cellists on the improving scene – is obvious at every turn.

The Bauhaus Quartet has the same vivid energy as the early Iron Monkey Trio with saxophonist Bob Cetusk and bassist Andy Erlau. In this line-up Tony Malaby has a more oblique, Shakti-influenced approach than Cetusk's very refined scottish and trumpeter Dave Bellou gives the group the same kind of exploratory energy to be found in a whole slew of post-jazz quartets in the early '70s. Except that this music is being up to date and any group featuring Norton and bassist John Lindberg (a Braxton associate of even longer standing) and a brilliant composer in his own right) hardly feels the need of a harmony player to call the shots.

It is, in fact, Lindberg who provides much of the continuity. His flawless line on the opening "D Major" (also used as a title on the trio disc) is as hard as the Bauhaus's signature concrete but also as warm as crilled ligament, and check out how he swings the opening of "Dilemma" – simple and crafty bass playing. The contradictions of that architectural design movement are turned into creative challenges here. This music is futuristic populism, built up in clearly demarcated sections but full of intriguing sonic points, functional but also very beautiful. The percussion often sounds like a busy workbench, especially on the improvised "Scout Soul". Norton's political and social engagement is always expressed in a questioning rather than dogmatic form – from the Situationalist subtext of that first BN release to meninges of the performance artist Kathy Church, who immolated herself in creative depression and as a protest against the Gulf War. In the same way he interrogates our expectations of a "jazz combo".

He has a pupish with the veteran bassist Milt Hinton, fondly remembered on the QNP album, to thank for his understanding of jazz history, every bit as much as he has a more recent association with Braxton to nag him in the direction of stops. Moholy-Nagy's Light-Space Modulator was the Bauhaus's most ambitious gesture towards global village, a prototype personal entertainment device that plugged you right into the zeitgeist, no questions asked. Norton and his colleagues do the same. This is a modern record you'll want to make part of your furniture.

## ON FILLMORE SLEEPS WITH FISHES DUANE BASKETT CD BY JOHN GILL

US critic Matthew Murphy hits a nerve when comparing this third recording by the duo of

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# Size Matters

## 3", 7", 10" and other misshapen formats

Brain Duff's Modified Toy Orchestra

Birmingham's Brian Duff is **The Modified Toy Orchestra**, and the second angle he has released under that name, *This Is The Monkey/Ode To Joy* (Warm Circuit 7") is quite excellent. Other people who use these kind of things as exclusive sound sources (gongs, toys, etc.) get tripped by the cuteness factor that can be built into such devices. Everything they create is a reaction to this, one way or another. Duff does not seem to feel the heat of the strangeness. He does include a few gaily elements at times, but mostly this music is a wonderfully forward-moving electronic soundscape that gobbles up beats and squeals without regard for their actual source. "Ode To Joy" (which doesn't seem to be the Beethoven piece, but what do I know?) is especially gaily and goping. Very pleasurable stuff.

**Et Sans** is a Canadian duo comprising Roger Teller-Craig and Alexander St-Onge. Their eponymous release, *Et Sans* (Square Teller Press 3" CD-R), is a mix of fucked and/or toy sounds, some found, some created. The disc has one extended track, which unspools like a long slow slide into a fortress of onsets, by listeners armed with only some thick leather gloves and a path helmet full of tracheal chimes. Feet drag awfully as we dauntless explorers get deeper and deeper into the chirping cacophy, but swigs of cheese and delightful slaps keep us moving and alert. And then the shift really starts to come down.

**Per Heider** is a well-known deviant stealer of the world of laptop experimentalism. His work with V/M/M, Mr. Goodspeed and others has made very of that duck wiggle like an otter. Or so we've heard. Anyway, here he is, alone and naked in the icy Danish night, doing something like a stab at pop music from hellmouth. Because he who is he, this is not exactly a straight tale on it, but the tracks have enough bits of normalcy between them to "pass" made many clubs or bouzouks. I start counting: *The Blueprint* (LUUD 7") has a vibe that makes me think of *Man Of Words*—a little, singing Carpenteresque, while being backed by a small complement of robotic earthworms. There is a kind of pliancy that you associate with worms...uh...there? And there are other things, too. How dandy! *Jason Ferret/Donneau* is another piece from the same Goodspeed puzzle. And their new single, *Mastedon* (*Raze/100%* Goodspeed) (LUUD 7") is a little more of what you perhaps expect—no-said-on it, but

spew-and-saturate noise in a very chaotic and amusing way. One side uses a variety pack of sources, the other delimits exclusively Goodspeed material. And it's dandy, too!

Hearty-ass new wave stuffing is **Heist's** stock in trade, but the UK version of it is aesthetically very different from the American brand. Heist's second single, *Feel Cheap/Letter X (inBACK 7")* has many more subtle pop-crop groups than to anything even slightly resembling Tenor. No wave shenanigans. The electronics here do the huddle buckle all night, but the ac-shaping articulation is more like something from the Vopons than from Dark Day. How this makes you feel will be ultimately dependent on the sermone weight of your trousers (a personal decision, and one we will not get into here). But if you can handle it, go ahead.

**Left Handed Decision** (LHD) is yet another of Jason Wilson's jitter or so projects. This one's a duo with Phil Blankenship and their single, *Hands Of The Pressures* (misc 7") kind of looks like Norwegian Death Metal or something, but sounds more like a dentist's drill, as recorded from deep inside Oates Hoffman's ass cavity. The result is a classic hi-fi power electronics kettle gale, straight from the mouth of the American underground to yours. Just be sure you wash your hands before and after you play it.

**Living Ornaments** are Lars Meyer and Coen Pelek. This Dutch duo manages to spout a quite exceptional cloud of post-formulae electronic gurg, using truly fucked-up beats and skittering melodic constructions of all kinds. On *Klonen* (Scorcelight 3" CD-R), these constructions range from China Gate sort of fake onenals, to croaking vials of phantasmagoria lightshow haphazard, to plateaus of static-on-dub-as-static. None of the seven pieces here is necessarily enough to make you spit out the mouthpiece of your hookah, but listened to in a row, the pieces line up like beautiful blobs of candy-colored haphazard.

**Dans La Morlagne** (X) (Xin Xie) (Chise 3" CD) is an incredible new short by the French electroacoustic composer **Uweil Hurewitz**. The source sounds are drawn from recordings of a Japanese fighting technique, and it is a goddamn massive blend. Screams tear through the darkness while bones clatter against bamboo thrusts and babies sob in the distance. This is just the sort of thing I was always playing late at night when I tripped a lot. Wish I would have had it 30 years ago. Ah well. You youngsters get to look out now.

**Suspicion Breeds Confidence** is the moniker that Tobias Schmidt uses for his solo musical works. And the newest SBC release in this house at this time is Schmidt (misc 7"). This is actually a duo work, pairing Schmidt's experimental sound destructions with saxophone and bowed double bass played by Alden Mark. The basic structure is quite loose. There are chattering of various types going on at a variety of levels of depth, while the "live" instruments stretch themselves sleepily in the foreground. Source material for the series is really hard to peg. There are percussive and whackables of various kinds, but whether they exist in this world (or the virtual one) is difficult to ascertain. And the whole of the works flow over the boundaries of the planned and the unplanned like a river filled with salmon. Which is pretty cool.

**Telnet's** *The Toy Box* (Mulan 3AK3 CD) is an impressive little package. As well as the three CDs, there's a swell book of cartoons, all packed up in a banded cardboard box. What could be fier? Well, a few things probably, but this box is still pretty heavy. Each of the disks has its own title: "Small Sound All Around," "I Piece For Pong Ping," "Welcome To The Jungle." The tracks all feature toy piano as the lead, but there are lots of other things tossed on too: also: from Ralph Camery's sax to a variety of toy instruments and on and on. The tunes range from a Metallica cover to nursery rhyme imprints, and there is a lot less out-of-the-box than you might first think. There is some, of course, this is (after all) music to be played by cartoon bunnies. But what the fuck, inside that context, it shines. (BC)

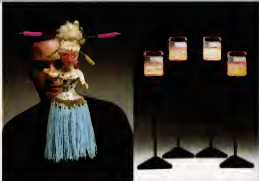
Taking its title from the tale of thunder god Indra from the ancient Hindu epic the *Ramayana*, who sent lightning bolts down from mortals below, **Doog's** *India's Arrow* (Las 3" CD) is a live recording from the popular venue Cafe Independents where this duo are key contributors to Kyoto's contemporary improv/scene scene. *Katsumi Mouri* (technique) is also one half of longstanding radical turntablist duo Bussetti (with Daktari Manamory) who have worked with numerous Christian Marley and Otomo Yoshimichi. Much Mouri also plays guitar with local improvisers Colpe and contributes the affected low-pitched vocals here reminiscent of the pathetic cry of an embezzled space monster (or Indra himself?) But such otherworldly metaphors for Doog's imposing sound are

perhaps inappropriate. Closer inspection of the CD cover (which portrays a cemetery) suggests that Doog are impelled by an anger at the futility of war. (PH)

Three new miniature forays into the electronic abstract from Hamburg: **Amus Tietehaus**'s *Enne Gener Minge* (Bussetti/Flaser 3" CD) pays its own small homage to the pioneers of concrete, as might be expected from one who collaborates with Thomas Klumner under the moniker of Kontakt Der Jährlinge. On this, the fourth in his Tietehaus series, it's once again achieved by means of relatively simple and/or antique devices such as sinewave sounds, white noise and Moog synthesizer. It's effectively desolate, however, on "Tietehaus 35a," ghostly white wails of electricity leak from empty rooms down gurgles into air ducts before emerging into more expansive chambers. On "Tietehaus 27," the sound of distant sleighbells coupled with deep metallic breathing reminiscent of Stockhausen's *Hymnen* throws up an image of Darth Vader in some deep space hideaway anxiously awaiting the visit of Santa Claus. "Tietehaus 29" Medusa and glows like a malfunctioning, unattended-to straight and generally evokes the image of long-abandoned satellite equipment still wheeling respectably through orbit.

Sound artist **Sietan Funk** created the 21 minute *Tau* (Bussetti/Flaser 3" CD) from field recordings of melting ice and the clatter of icy twigs and branches while tramping across the North German countryside in the winter of 2003. The first, "nature" part features the spliding and layering of these sounds, which amass and host like ogles of whispering furies. The second part sees the sampled material fed into a computer, which spits out a series of intriguing permutations and multiplications of the original recordings.

**Gregory Bröther** is another sound artist and photographer from the same Kosme Hamburg collective. 3 1/2 (Bussetti/Flaser 3" CD) features three short, untitled pieces, again amounting to around 21 minutes, over which a wintry pollen once more hangs. Track one creates a chilly pop saucer, from which dark objects slowly loom, like a convey of slow moving agglomerates. The second track is more complex in its shading and aural imagery, dark and ominous, while the third track, by contrast, is an En-oque pleasure, a serene, telescopic survey of a cloudless night sky. (DS) □ Reviewed by Byron Coley, Paul Hood and David Stubbs



bassist Dann Gray and Wilco percussionist Glenn Kotche to fellow Chicagoans Tortoise. As well as a full tide of water noises and birdsong, in fact so much water you could swim across this recording, I share Tortoise's sneaky affection for gamelan music, the quieter corners of early Steve Reich and, perhaps unintentionally, the synthesizer pieces that Angelo Badalamenti wrote for the soundtrack of *Ten Peaks*.

Like Tortoise, however, something more complex is going on buried in the risk. The sinistral evocations for triangle (or sometimes bowed) vibraphone and acoustic bells, simply laden with water splashes, dog barks, children shouting, a helicopter I thought was outside my house, traffic noises and scary, Twilight Zone toy xylophones, cover cozily sampled treatments of the two men's main instruments. There's a sonic game of hide and seek going on here and it appears that their challenge to the listener is to ask you exactly why.

At times this can sound like Gary Burton falling asleep while watching a Discovery Channel documentary about Bali. It is too cute to be read merely as ambient music. Gray and Kotche, co-composers with Seric Wuth of Jim D'Anjou, are portraying an elaborate musical concert here. Perhaps one of the musicians' credits holds a clue: alongside their main instruments, both are also credited with "places," which might be where they recorded all that water. It could be a tip of the hat to John Cage's gorgeous inkblots, but as equally it could be a wink in the direction of his mischievous *Cheep Imitation*, which took musical fraud into the realms of Borges, who would have adored this CD as much as I do.

**ELIANE RADIGUE  
ELEMENTAL II**  
ROSA CD

BY DAN WARBURTON

Commissioned and first performed in January 2004 by bassist Kasper Røpke, *Elemental II* is the inaugural release of Røpke's label rosa, which stands for Recordings Of Steane Art — though steane is about the last adjective in the world one would choose to describe the music of Eliane Radigue. Often misleadingly associated with the music concrete establishment through her work with Pierre Henry, the mystery and magic of Radigue's music occupies a twilight zone of minimalism between the static drones of Young, Conrad and Niblock and the gradual processes of Reich and Glass.

It's forever on the move, albeit very slowly —

speed it up fivefold in some music software and you'll be surprised — but constructed so meticulously that it somehow slips out of time altogether. Based on an earlier work dating from 1968, *Elemental II* is devised as an evocation of the five elements (earth, water, fire, air and ether), its 50 minutes falling into five descending sections of roughly equal length. The beginning of each new section is clearly perceptible, but elsewhere the slow changes characteristic of her music seem to take place under the surface of the music, as it were.

It's very much "a native sound emerging freely from the earth" (the composer's descriptions would be true if they weren't so spot on), with change perceived as having taken place rather than taking place. However many times you listen — and this is music you will return to on many occasions — you'll probably never quite figure out how she did it. As elusive as the music itself is Røpke's own contribution, as nothing resembles the electric bass he's recorded as playing. The opening nine minutes of sub-bass rumble ("roaring as a deep low wave, as the resonance of thunder in the depth of a high mountain valley") gradually give way to the minimalist drone of section two ("Water: Fluidity"), before the music is crumpled in the fire of section three. The crackle and rattle of air into flames is like Conrad's PH will large, and if the eerie glissando of the fourth section also recall Kossaki, the final evocation of "Ether" is quintessentially Radigue, dense, rich and mysterious.

**RYTHM & SOUND  
SEE MI YAH**  
BURAL MAX CD  
BY BRIAN MARLEY

The jury is still out on one-rhyme albums. The ones that work best tend, unsurprisingly, to be those containing the greatest amount of variation, where the rhythm is reduced to its basic elements and built substantially anew for each version. It also helps if the chosen rhythm is particularly compelling. That's true of the recent *Blood & Fire* compilation, *Two Of Satta Vol 1*, built entirely on The Abyssinians' seminal "Satta Massagana", which, some 30 years after its creation, is still being subjected to version galore.

But the latest collection from Rhythm & Sound manages to break both of those rules, and one or two more besides. The "See Mi Yah" rhythm is generic reggae, dread style rather than pop style,

and the lyrics of this song and the nine others on the CD could have been assembled circa 1976 from a handbook of Rasta phraseology and a well-thumbed copy of the King James Bible. Strongly, this doesn't tell against the project. Nor does it sound retro. The German producers Mark Ernestus and Moritz Von Döwack, who between them constitute Rhythm & Sound, have laid a fruitful middle ground between much slowed down Detroit techno and an electronically generated approximation of 1970s roots reggae that draws considerable strength from both genres.

The sound of Lee "Scratch" Perry's tropically hurried, gassy-saturated Black Ark studio process influenced David "Bullwinkle" Barnes's USA productions, which, in turn, influenced Ernestus and Von Döwack. During the transition from Kingston to New York to Berlin the temperature has fallen. Even Jah Cotton (also known as Joseph Cotton), an understating Jamaican DJ, whose wonderful *Dancehall Days 1976-1984* is available on Moll-Sekale, here on See Mi Yah sounds cooler, less fiery, although his message remains no less urgent. Cotton, Sugar Minott and Wessie Gabriel are the established stars of this operation, though Paul St Hilaire (formerly known as Tawana until copyright issues forced a change of name), has been working productively with Rhythm & Sound since 1998 and has a strong track record. As well as providing "Free For All", the final song on See Mi Yah, St Hilaire contributes backing vocals and guitar. His restrained but insistent delivery is typical of many of the other, lesser-known contributors, Will Williams, Kok, Rod Of Iron, Ras Darowan, Ras Pwaz, Freddy Mellow and Bobbo Shanti, all of whom turn in quality performances.

Ernestus and Von Döwack have declared that they want to add "a horizontal dimension to dub music." This is apparent in the liner, less choppy, almost trance-like progression of See Mi Yah, especially on the final track, which is, in effect, the version of versions. The bass is much less booming and physical than in roots reggae, and there's more of King Tubby's dramatic flourishes and apocalyptic thrashing of the reverb unit. Yet blindness is avoided, and the music is compelling throughout. Like Rhythm & Sound, and 2004's non-identical *Two Rhythms & Sound vs. The Artists and The Versions*, See Mi Yah transports dub to a different dimension, one with lower gravity, in which music seems to float across time.

**TERRY RILEY &  
MICHAEL MCCURE  
I LIKE YOUR EYES LIBERTY**  
BY JULIAN COWLEY

As the vocabulary of freedom becomes day by day more thickly encrusted with the shirt of American liberal policy, it's salutary to hear the voice of Michael McCure, a poet who for 50 years in print has explored states of freedom with candour and athletic intelligence. He writes poetry with acute eyes and ears, translating critical observation into precisely translated verbal notations, celebrating the animal body and human consciousness growing out from it. He's an expert reader too, with an actor's voice, sensual and attuned finely to evidence and nuances of enunciation. And he's learned from musicians, as his Best associate Jack Kerouac might have noted, McCure knows Time.

In the wake of his friendship with The Doors' Jim Morrison, McCure developed a close working relationship with that group's keyboard player Ray Manzarek. I Like Your Eyes Liberty, wilyly recorded in Terry Riley's Californian studio, raises McCure's association with music to a new plane. Riley uses a range of keyboards, acoustic and electronic, to generate radiant real-time arrangements, not mere accompaniment but spontaneously made settings that draw together strands of his own decades of rich musical experience, Garland tonalities and ragga spirit, stately grand progressions and jazz in retrospective modes, electronic shaman and prepared piano percussiveness elaborate McCure's arresting images and measured speech.

As well as texts from his 2002 book Plum Stones, McCure revisits his 1964 *Greatest Dances* where, moved by Antonin Artaud, he physically imagines "bass language", voice acknowledging openly its flesh and muscle. His delivery through these incantations remains disciplined from within — no scintillas or histrionics but articulate grunts, moans and quiet roars that move smoothly from and into verbal shapes and shared meanings.

However, Joseph Conrad once wrote that words are the great loss of reality. The results of impenetrable politicians prove his point. But McCure has always wanted to sustain fidelity of language to our given physical realities. This recording will of course have no traceable impact on political decisions but it gives form to what is currently under immense threat from an official discourse of cynical deception and overt violence. It's a serious statement about getting in

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# The Compiler

Various artists: reviewed, rated, reviled

Reviewing Blanchot: Steve Roden (left) and Stephen Vitiello

After 2002's *Sul* compilation dedicated to Chris Maelle, the Portuguese Set label now issues *Neil Me Lagere... To Maurice Blanchot* (Set CD) chosen to honour another enigmatic Frenchman, novelist, critic and activist Maurice Blanchot (1907-2003). Though famously reclusive and plagued by ill health, Blanchot campaigned against French colonial power in Algeria ("I refuse all the past and accept nothing of the present," he wrote in 1958) and openly supported the Student Writers' Action Committee in 1968. The source of the discombobulated words intimately inflected — shades of Robert Ashley — by Brandon LaBelle and Maria Nilsson on track one isn't stated, though the title "The one who is standing close to me" is a clear reference to Blanchot's 1953 *Calice* (or *McKinnon's* *Calice*). Christal Magon's "T" is just as attractive, despite being scored from sounds produced by the human eye ("eyelids were stretched, eyelids settled and squashed, two ducts made to whistle"). If Sir boss Paulo Raposo's offering is a chilly, distancing soundscape that consciously blurs the distinction between inside and outside, Stephen Vitiello's "essential perceptions" is resolutely the latter, but in its recordings of French street protests (perhaps a homage to Blanchot's peripatetic in the evenings of 68), complete with car horns, whistles and chants. The austere drone of Julien Ottawa's "massacration" is followed by Steve Roden's "thorns sat down and looked at the sea", another one of the California-based sound artist's introspective offerings featuring treatments of his voice and guitar, and the album closes with Bishiya Issou's "crescent scarves resembling a bottle inside of a bottle". One wonders what possible connection there might be between Vitiello's extremely noisy shrieks and the paucity of his writing, but like the other six pieces on the album and Blanchot's own writing, it will have you coming back for more. (DW)

Sounding dangerously close to a topic segment for the TV series *Grimy Did Men*, **BBC Awards For World Music 2005** (Montecarlo 2ACD) surveys the globe and comes up with 28 tracks by shortlisted performers. The World Music genre began as a marketing exercise — and there's more than a whiff of those roots here. Furthermore, it's clear that to cut the World musicised these days, you must have a good producer. Pop singer Savanah Nazimforn from Uzbekistan has Hector Zazou, while Tinariwen, the famed desert blues group from Mali, have ex-Brit Westbait guitarist Jason Adams — they sound great and they scooped the Africa award. No surprise that Youssou N'Dour won the Critics Award but at least he deserved it this time, for his remarkable devotional album, *Egypt*

Among women singers, the wonderful Kaushiki Chakrabarti sings straight Thums (Indian folk classical), topped by her dad on harmonium, to tap the Asia/Pacific category. Bebel Gilberto's second solo album will sell millions anyway. It is so laudably lovely and expensively produced that she doesn't need another award. Björk pops up in the Boundary Crossing department; fair enough, as she's aiming to become the avant garde Peter Gabriel on "Who Is It?", featured here. Vocalist Sarikhe Namdylak is on her best behaviour, for those who have glimpsed her bedazzling improv side, turning in a jolly clark of Tuvan skills that Larive Denzang could have lacked. Otherwise there's a plethora of radio-friendly and slightly formulaic efforts, whose artists sound like they share one burning ambition — to be picked as soundtrack for a soft drinks commercial. Though as far as I know only Gotan Project have achieved that rare distinction. (CJB)

Miles Clever's superb **Ghana Soundz Volume 2** (Soundway CD/2XLP) may be the umpteenth collection of African funk to appear in recent years, but on this evidence we are nowhere near approaching *Blondations Over The Sorensen* yet. The rare funk brotherhood will swear to their graves that Bobby King & His Silver Fox Band is rarer and purer than the Godfather because the shitty production values and leaky musicianship control greatness, but with African funk they may have a point. On a recent like *The Sweet Relief* "Kye Kye Pe Awele", that slight dissonance caused by the Akabira and a few hundred years of history makes the groove just a tad bit stranger, the ancient. Farisa lacks a tad bit stronger, more charming — signifying something other than ineptitude and muddy feelings. Then there's the Dyerwona Sound Band's leagued deep "Disco Africa", which has a baseline that makes your bones rattle and a percussion breakdown that's a dead ringer for the one on "Capocapota". The music here is the sound of musicians who manage to express joy and possibility and excitement despite the shittiness of their equipment, not because of it. (PS)

The highlight of **Bernstadt 2002** (Cal Negro CD), a documentation of the 2002 Bernstadt New Music Festival, is due Nadine Crudele (2001) by Italian composer Salvatore Sciaccino, here played with tremendous verve by British pianist Nicholas Hodges. In his programme note, Sciaccino philosophises about the meaning of "nocturne" and "night music", suggesting it is music that "sets itself outside the time of normal daily life". He messes with the listener's perception of time with supple elongations of material, while obliquely hammered notes in the high register of the

piano create the illusion that notes are splintering. Sebastian Cloren's effective calls and orchestra work After Bivoly Palermo (2001-02) takes its cue from an associate of Joseph Beuys and pushes the stereotype plinks 'n' plinks of post-serialism to absurdist lengths; but Nam-Kuk Kim's *Fu-Du* sadly makes do with those stereotypes. Other works by Gerhard Müller-Hornbach and Caspar Johannes Walter make up the balance. (PC)

**Threshold Of Pain/Threshold Of Hearing** (Mnemosyne 4XCD) documents two events curated by Alex Keller at Seattle's Polestar Music Gallery. The first, in December 2002, was devoted to quiet, minimal electronic music and sound art; the second, in April 2003, took the same terms but was loud. That distinction is inevitably compromised by transfer to disc: the temptation to waqad your volume level is strong. Although some frenzied white noise and roaring distortion emanates from the second disc, it's not given over to bludgeoning or lacerating loudness, and the recording of those quiet pieces can make for lively listening, most notably during the starting staccato bursts that punctuate Vitiello's contribution to the fourth CD. On both occasions the performers were mBML, Jake Elliott, Mateo Chavez, Vince Galloway, Jeffery Mott, Mike 563 and Steve Benard. Despite the minimal tag, their input is often quite detailed and respects context in ways that sidestep the new-fangled genre mishmash of buzz, hum and gig. The contrasting terms in the title suggest that this ambitious release is the outcome of a conceptually deep project, illustrating some phenomenological point about sound and volume. The music is by no means just illustrative material. There's witely within Keller's coherent programming and a good deal that is directly appealing as well as potentially thought-provoking. (JC)

More than any MC, producers Target and the headman Danny Weed and their Aim High imprint stand beside Tenax Darjah at the very forefront of Grime. **Aim High Volume Two** (Aim High CD) and its unmissable accompanying DVD already looks set to be one 2005's key releases. It's a landmark for Grime in terms of its scope, panoply of rhythms, MCs and singers, and its beautiful production.

Target's sound is immediately recognisable, a spurring open-spaced mesh of hollow typists, pooding tom-toms, Madro Eastern acceleration and Sylvian's *Madro* like guitar synthesiser. It's the most bewitching context you can imagine for the dead break of Grime's finest MCs Riko Dan, Ruff Sound and Bruzo. Target, who like many of the Grime artists, cut his teeth on Jungle, ransacks this accident for subtle dread and tools these sounds into squaky narratively seductive ultra-modern grooves. It's essentially the same

musique that finds Wiley shopping for samples at World Music shop Sterns. The CD is home to some real nifty Bruzo's "Freestyle" showcases his dapper effect delivery over Target's glacial drum beat. On combative enantiomers like "You've got a few rhymes but you're just not ready", Bruzo's lines fall off as though you were falling down a well. The effect is at once chilling and hilarious. This is to say nothing of the man's poetry: "I'm goin' like steady go/Born ready from the get go".

Dogzilla's "Neverending Storm", in which Dog-2 tells movingly of his battle against the odds in "the game" over what is a minger for a Rhythm is Hyphen track, is set to be a future classic. Other highlights include Roll Deep's "Don't Cheat" with his Akabira-infused Maroon music (M). It's tough to finger just exactly when the concept of psychedelic rock became almost synonymous with a strain of bar band jazz that cut functional chops with endless two-chord pub boogie, perfunctory four leads and dud beats, but that's exactly the strain championed by the new budget level **Half Of Miwren** (Empire Jones 2ACD) compilation assembled by Miwren (Jones of Suburbanised Space. Ostensibly showcasing a clutch of the most fearless musicians ever to breach the horizons of form, the set actually adds up to one of the most unadventurous leads into the gulf this side of stadium scale crust like Gino Tentacles. Most of the music has about as much in common with the spirit of Helgi-Ashbury, Texas and Tokyo as a contemporary

Moore group like Blues Traveler has with Sep James. It's the sound of a wild, intuitive tradition reduced to formulaic, workman-like beats. Worst offenders are Jones's own Suburbanised Space and Seattle space rockers Kinski, both of whom deliver metronomic, technically precise workouts that are about as likely to dissolve any linear notions of time and space as a jam sandwich. What exactly is psychedelic about a bunch of polite dudes cutting a tight, glossy jam?

Elsewhere there's some shadowy bar band Metal from would-be riff monsters Porfing and Soakies/Venier. And even confirmed misanthropes like Bardo Pond, Acid Mothers Temple and Overhanging Party run in laconic tracks — or else it just sounds that way due to all of the monochrome company they're keeping? Only Tokyo young bloods Up-Tight and muscular US power the Gwilar drive anything close to face-melting venom, with Up-Tight's umpteenth nodding of their signature theme "Sweet Sister" the track that dribs farthest into the void. Here vocalist and guitarist Akai works words from formless screams of reflected white light, while the whole track kalendres into a sick, skull-fucking pulse (K). [Reviewed by Philip Darr, Adrian Cowley, David Keenan, Matthew Ingram, Peter Shapiro and Dan Worburton]





touch and the considerable pleasure it offers is an integral part of its importance.

**WADADA LEO SMITH & ANTHONY BRAXTON SATURN, CONJUNCT THE GRAND CANYON IN A SWEET EMBRACE**  
PI CD  
BY ADAM MORTON

If it had been asked to sum up last year's *Organs: Resonance* from time pressing, I'd have probably said "four and a bit studies" which is odd, since this one is positively lightyears and matter. The set is dominated by Braxton's "Composition No. 316", a bravura collage of tonal and atonal effects that occasionally sounds designed to encourage the two players to sound as unlike themselves as possible. How, for example, does Smith create the frantic whistling that accompanies one of the saxophone's most unfettered solos? Is that ludicrous vibrato the only way you can get a decent sound out of the F saxophone? Elsewhere, he sticks to Bb soprano, Eb soprano and his tenor alto, but he honks like Rasooli Mitchell (a too rarely acknowledged affinity) and wibbles away at melodic ideas like Jeffrey Hodges on a NASA programme.

It's hugely entertaining stuff that was probably yet more effective at the original gig — the set was taped at Tonic in New York in April 2003. The shorter title piece, ostensibly composed by Smith, starts out with wacky saxophone lines over held tones on trumpet (or fughorn), it's hard to judge, and develops into an expansive musical exercise that makes the absolute scale of the title seem perfectly appropriate.

The only disappointment of the set is the short, improvised "Goshawk", which concludes proceedings. Possibly added for good measure, it dilutes the resolute logic of the first two pieces to no very convincing end. There's probably an argument for making the best of this with *Organic Resonance* and putting it out as a double set, but they do have a different character and this is how I like to hear both these guys from time to time: having fun, psyching each other out, pushing the envelope by not taking things too seriously.

**DAVID SYLVIAN THE GOOD SON VS THE ONLY DAUGHTER: THE BLEMISH REMIXES**  
SAMACHIROUND CD  
BY DAVID STUBBS

2003's *Blemish* was a significant improvement on David Sylvian's previous album, the far from redemptive *Dead Bees On A Cake*. Whereas *Dead Bees* batted in jazz waltzes warmed by the domestic bliss the single enjoyed, *Blemish* was more spartan and angrier, with David Sylvian's guitar interventions jabbing like bangs at any sentiment into Ambient complacency. Whether the eastern mood of *Blemish* was presented by Sylvian's taste about living in America during the Bush era or by more personal, obscure concerns is a moot point. Whatever, the album leaves the reader open to colour to colour.

Remix projects can prove to variability of quality and commitment, some lovingly worked on, others phoned in with the sound of the meter running in the background psychically audible. This is an altogether different proposition. The

remixers here approach the originals with reverence but also relish, adorning their walls without blithely ignoring through them. First and most striking is Royce Ikeda's orchestral reworking of "The Only Daughter", which he adorns with turquoises and billowing sulphurs taken from Alban Berg's pellets, the turbulent sound climate reflecting the song's unsettled mood. Burnt Friedman is more discreet in his treatment of "Blemish", the odd creeping reverb injections providing the only trace of the signature Akira Rabelais, in reworking the same track, leaves it largely preserved, though his little alterations are telling. Sweet Billy Pilgrim's treatment of "The Heart Knows Better" preserves the intimacy fragility and tension of the original though its delicate and disparate instrumentation. Yoshihiro Hannon's remix of "The Good Son" initially seems a bit gig in its glitch past but angular interventions of acoustic guitar pay neat homage to Billy's Blemish contributions. Tazuvaku Asano, by contrast, extravagantly and audaciously disregards Billy's template on "How Little We Need To Be Happy", creating a lush soundscape of vapour trails, heavenly Muzak reverberating around imaginary shopping malls and highly pressing neo-lipstick flourishes, a liquid cocktail of hallucinations which gradually breaks down into its constituent parts.

**TATWATER THE NEEDLE WAS TRAVELLING**  
MORR MUSIC CD  
BY MARTIN LONGLEY

Nobody wants to recommend that a group stand still, but with Tatwater's new album it's tempting to make unfavourable comparisons with 1998's classic *Salv*. The German duo's fifth album is, for all that, more of what appears to be their own label, following an inspired run on Berlin's Kitty-Yo Records Lippok (also of To Rococo Rot) and Bernd Jestrup have steadily led behind their menacing ambience of old, uniaxial rusty drums and guitars in the writing process, as they switch to bright electro-pop miniatures.

The keyboard textures and beat patterns are more overtly influenced by a 1980s palette, as are Lippok's intoned vocals, its almost impossible to discern whether his deadpan countenance is authentically serious, or simply expressing a firsthand, uncomplicated love of robotic pop. Is the end, it doesn't really matter.

The short songs are full of what are intended as melodic gestures, packed with tuneful flourishes. At least this is the theory, but even after repeated hearings, most of the numbers don't increase in their catchiness. "Bather's Tower" is an exception, but then this is a cover of 1980s Belgian canoe Minimal Concept and it benefits from an infectious guitar line. Tatwater make good use of the spaces that lie between their drum, bass, guitar and synthesiser lines, encouraging a stoppped down posture. Synthetic horn sections ambulate the edges and there's some genuine humour on two tunes. "Fly Blob" is a touching rock 'n' roll ballad, featuring Rochester's Marcus Weber on guitar. Schneider TM guests on "Home Baited" but doesn't divert Tatwater's slightest sound. "Unseen In The Desert" is the set's stand-out, its strong vocal chorals mirrored with easily sliding keyboard atmospheres. Pop bait is not a problem, it's just that in Tatwater's take on a nagging tunes and interesting textures are in short supply.

**CECIL TAYLOR UNIT ONE TOO MANY SALTY SWIFT AND NOT GOODBYE**  
HATLOGY LTD CD  
BY BRIAN MORTON

Cecil Taylor likes to make an entrance. Those who witnessed his Royal Festival Hall concert with Bill Dixon and Tony Oxley last November might conclude that he sometimes gets the timing wrong. By about half an hour in that case, but when he's at his best, Taylor has an uncanny knack of turning up the anticipation so acutely that his very first note at the piano has more drama than most players manage in their most full-on passages and final cadences.

My issue with most writing about Taylor is that it overplays his virtuosity, which has his gaps and is no less formative than the average bebop player: at the expense of his genius as a group leader. That was never more evident than on his 1978 tour of Europe with a vintage Cecil Taylor Unit. It was a trip marked by various grouses. Violinist Ramsey Arneson apparently played this Stuttgart gig in his slingshot, to protest against the rudeness he'd encountered earlier that day. Taylor also had to contend with the Mauthausen's jazz plans, rather than the pristine instrument reserved for Chopin and Ust. Any hint of roadwornness — this was the last appearance of the tour — was mitigated by anger.

Taylor had worked out a brilliant means of keeping the music fresh and of giving his own appearance that little extra charge. The opening 20 minutes of old one consists of duets between saxophonist Jimmy Lyons and trumpeter Raphie Malik (who sound as if they're rehearsing "Round About Midnight"), a string duet between Arneson and bassist Siro, and an electrifying five minute drum solo from Ronald Shannon Jackson. Only then does Taylor take the stage and immediately blows his thumb at the doctored piano by treating it like a zither.

What's irremediably obvious to anyone who missed out on the line-up at the time (they're also heard on two New World CDs, Cecil Taylor Unit 3 Phase) is how carefully infected the music is. Taylor's playing is often light as air and the drama of the drama of the music comes from the tension and release of the group elements. Lyons spoke Taylor's language like a native. Jackson less securely but with an obvious desire to be part of things. The drummer had been part of Albert Ayler's similarly constructed group, in which Michael Sarrapian played the Amen role and maybe thought he'd get by with the same busy power. Sirone thrubs and roars. Malik sounds bright, broody, joyous and heartsome by turns.

They may have been pissed off, but there's a lot of music here, more than two hours of — to pinch from another great Taylor album title — luminously broad modern jazz in which slide, bow, abstraction, World Music elements and an occasional architectural detail from classical music are all contained. As if to make the point that these men are the equal of any suited and booted concert players, they take the final session as a violin/piano duet. Out of context, you'd wonder who in Berkley's shadow was responsible for the music. Arneson's high, fitting phrases move in and out of sync with the leader's accompaniment before Taylor finishes things off with soft, falling tones that suggest a new kind of night music. He does exit pretty well, too.

**TO LIVE AND SHAVE IN LA GOD AND COUNTRY RALLY**  
SMACKSHIRE CD  
BY GEEK DAVY

Noise rock is a genre that sometimes forgets to be funny. Much of it reaches funeral levels of solemnity, taking on a hallowed air that disdains the music's gross physiology, deadness and its other ridiculousness. Cosmumate hucksters and long-running outcasts to Live And Shave in LA are the pokers in the high court of noise rock, dividing it into flocks of sonic rapists with screwball antics and a decidedly welcome sense of humor.

God And Country Rally was originally recorded in 1995 by core Shave members Ben Smith, Ben Wolcott and Frank R. Bartelme. Falestia, and now it's finally released, complete with dubious sleeveprints that include the claim that it's "high-fiving the ghosts of Liza, Neneke, Sukowski, Cage, Johnath, Pardo and Russell as they rush toward the homestead of sacric ideology." Yeah, yeah, whatever, but nearly a decade later, the recordings still have the power to inflame; a recent glowing review in a paper in the group's home state of Florida reads: "A bunch of distortion, random noise, and wailing vocals is not a song, it is a crap." Well, those readers who revel in the "crap" that is distortion, random noise and wailing vocals will find plenty to savor on God And Country Rally. From the cherry-titled "A Get Married Kiss-Tart" (featuring a guest spot by David Solovay, credited with "Rebuke and Admonition", and Smith on "prepared Sane UI Series Cassette Tape Deck") to the tortured howl and jittery convulsions of "Zun Antelope". Still, it's all a poor facsimile compared to seeing To Live And Shave's legendary live performances. The Shave are the Happy Mondays of noise rock, and Ben Smith is their Baz, presiding over a potboiler pick 'n' mix like that's part of each sidekick, part lunatic cabaret and part nonstop dance net. The current Shave live line-up is bolstered by the key addressees of Mappet-like Andrew WK on drums and why Mark Morgan of Sightings on guitar. But while they're waiting for them to come sock your town, there's this to life you over.

**VARIOUS RADIO PHONO PENH**  
SUBLINE FREQUENCIES CD  
BY DEREK WALMSLEY

2004's *Cambodian Cassette Archives* was one of the very best compilations of last year, a breathtaking sampler of fictitiously imaginative Cambodian pop from the 1960s to the 80s. On Radio Phono Penh, Subline Frequencies presents the contemporary sound of Cambodia — the source material is AM/FM pop radio broadcasts no more than six months old at the time of writing, collected and presented as a montage with occasional newswires and adverts by The Sun City Girls' Alan Bhup.

This compilation is initially less striking than its predecessor. While 1980s Cambodian pop studios would make astonishing detours into tripe-like psychedelia, glossy Heavy Metal and echey dub, these days the music industry aims more pragmatically at over smoother, sleeker arrangements of popular classics. Yet while the level of their sonic thrill may have reduced, the bouncy energy and joy melodies are distilled even purer. Instrumentation might come from

# The Boomerang

New reissues: rated on the rebound

Exhaustive or exhausting: Brian Eno revised and updated



"I do not aim towards interesting music — structurally, thematically, formalistically," American composer **Harry Partch** wrote to a friend in 1952. "If it is incidental, because I am at convincing drama, dysrhythm, spontaneous emotional reactions." This particularly revealing comment is quoted as the first of Bob Gilmore's superb sleeve notes to *The Harry Partch Collection Volume 3 (New World CD)*. Not only does this statement make sense in connection with Partch's work as a whole but it also offers a convincing argument as to why recordings and films of his work can never be, in the composer's words, more than a "sad compromise." Marking a point of renewal between the chorus of Greek tragedy celebrated with such intensity by Friedrich Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy*, and the barbershop quartet, including the sacred games that took place on the plains of ancient Troy and the tumbling trials and shower stalls of the high school gym, Partch's work can only be understood at the level of vernacular myth. As depicted on *Notori! Partch — An Intermession With Prologues And Epilogues*, "a satirical piece with delirious undertones" from 1961 and the longest work included here, there is at its most alive when it chooses itself as its main subject. Based on Partch's observation that the real focal point of an evening's entertainment is when the audience dashes out during the interval for water, it's a wryly energetic accumulation of pointed criticisms and over-articulated asides as they discuss a performance we never get to see or hear. Equally stunning is the score for *Motete The Body In All Its Phases — Ballet For Gymnasts*, a mythic take on the human body launched into space, featuring a brass band accompaniment that would certainly have made Charles live with wistfully of his bandmaster father. Widesound (1998), the soundtrack to a short film of the same name by Madeline Turellis, is an early less-than-perfect version of Partch's *Diaphane Of The Dunes*, by Partch's last composition, the elegiac *The Dreamer Remains — A Study In Lowing* (1972), this collection — a study in lowing (1972), this collection — offers proof that even a sad compromise with the time-based power of performance is worth making. (KH)

The ambitious project undertaken by Virgin Records of reissuing **Brian Eno's** solo recording projects digitally remastered and in a uniform CD edition is entering its final stages, a moment

that is marked by the subtle but nonetheless discernible shift from the exhaustive to the exhausting. Released together under the collective title of *Soundtracks*, the four individual albums under discussion display little cohesion or clarity, either collectively or individually. Lacking the conceptual rigor of the Ambient projects, such as *Music For Airports* or *Discreet Music*, or the experimental verve of his earlier songs, Eno's soundtrack material appears in retrospect as a series of pensive and tentative suggestions. Originally released in 1976, *Music For Films* is a gathering of scraps and shavings from one of Eno's most productive periods. Contrasting his soundtrack contributions to Derek Jarman's films *Sebastiane* and *Jubilee*, plus some remakes and outtakes from this innovative Another Green World, it remains little more than an interesting selection of moments and moods. *Apollo: Atmospheres And Soundtracks* (1983) has some truly sublime stretches, notably on "Deep Blue Day" and "Weightless," that set it aside from the solo albums that followed. The overall feel, however, soon seems a little sloopy and mawkish, the lightened sense of melancholy getting just a tad too mazy-eyed. Finding itself as an early CD release, *Thursday Afternoon* (1985) is an interrupted sear: a weightless expanse of downtime that might still be put to better use. It's still a lot more fun than the sad and painful collection that is *More Music For Films*, which is a revised and updated version of Eno's prime 1975 album, much of which made its way to daylight in 1983 as *Music For Films Volume 2*. Hearing "In Dark Trees" from *Another Green World* transformed into the gassy "Reactor" is enough to make you think that all good films should be seen and not heard. (KH)

Proof that The Zombies and their classic "Time Of The Season" were carefully studied in 1960s Brazil comes from the opening track of the **Os Mutantes** compilation, *Everything Is Possible* (Luaka Bop CD). "I Feel A Little Space Out" (or "Ando Meio Desligado") pitches adolescent guitar against obscure organ, while Rita Lee's breathy, psychedelic vocals yield to a gurgling twinkle on the outro. This likable piece of 60s nonsense is the best offering by far on David Byrne's assemblage of Os Mutantes, which certainly presents the group in all their potlory glory. Sensuality ("The apples around the naked bodies") and stoned gibberish ("Bedspread and sheets will collide") are here aplenty, upskaltered

by effects-lathered vocals and endless rip-offs from George Martin's Sgt. Pepper arrangements. Os Mutantes, teaming up with the Tropicália movement, were undeniably experimental and their commitment to electric rock managed to piss off both leftist students and Brazil's military dictatorship. An exotic flower, they managed three albums before imploding (Lee left in 1972), and when Kurt Cobain invited them to reform in 1993 they played him out two There's a dual of beach integrity on this record, plus vicious sneering at Carlos Santana (their enemy) and the Bado rhythms of north west Brazil (amusing on Brazilian TV, I guess). Sadly, this collection also highlights the group's inability to write a single decent song, without which this seems a parade of colorful parades and secondhand drugstore. (CB)

First released in 1989, *Heiter Stupid* (Seeland CD) by American culture jammers **Negativland** comes in two parts. The first is a sound collage, chronicling of one of their most notorious and morally dubious forays into subversion/self-publicity. The group had their publicist cause a press statement suggesting they had been linked with a multiple axe murder perpetrated by Minnesota 16 year old David Broth, who slaughtered his parents, mother and brother in 1988. Following an argument over a music tape held been listening to, Negativland suggested that the song that had triggered the argument, and the subsequent carnage, was their own "Christianity Is Stupid," and that they had been asked not to leave town pending an investigation. Numerous TV networks and newspapers ran with this fabrication unquestioningly, and press attention towards the group escalated. "Heiter Stupid Prologue" and the 18 minute "Heiter Stupid" are a series of scrappy snapshots of the farce, featuring documentary snippets of interviews, partly incidental music and snapshots of The Beatles' "Heiter Skeeler", an obvious echo of Charles Manson and his obsession with The White Album. Although the exercise is meant to satirize the gullibility of the mass media, and the idea is well executed, it still feels like Negativland is making capital of the actual, bloody execution of four human beings. The second side features a series of "Perfect Cuts," sound pieces designed to stress the "moribundness" of 70s music, revisiting its gloomily bombastic comedies and featuring the echos of deadeningly complacent

advances of its commercial prospects by nameless corporates. Fine, but the point is adequately made early on — and when they use the sublime guitar break to The Brothers Johnson's "Strawberry Letter 23," you wonder if when it comes to 70s dance music, these guys could tell shit from shins. (OS)

1992's *Our Red Is Green* (Kranky 2000) was the first ever release from **Charismabible**, back then the Texas duo of Tom and Christine Carter. Originally released as self-produced cassettes and later remixed in edited form on CD, it served to immediately establish their resolve, hands-on ethos, while signposting various routes out of the then creative cul de sac that guitarist/vocalist Tom Carter had found himself in as a member of the psychedelic rock group The Mike Gunn. In the light of the structural advances the group have made since — magnificently charging folk/drone modems with heavy, E-bow generated guitar and plotting the farthest reaches of song with nothing but a single chord as anchor — some of the material here ought seem a little midcentury, but overall *Our Red Is Green* is naive in the most fatal, unforgotten sense, with primitive electronic/sound structures evocative by virtue of its fuzz and the phrud of a cheap drum machine.

Their influences are a little more transparent at this stage, and the lo-fi music of Jandek and Loren Mazzacane and Keith Bloom figures highly as does the extended experiments of groups as diverse as Fairport Convention and Spacemen 3. But looks like the opening "Too," "OG" and — more bizarrely — the audio-visual piece "I Don't Know What Is Sing" all point towards the reconciliation of form and improvised process they would eventually effect. Christine Carter's vocals remain the central point around which much of this universe revolves, although they imply a whole lot more space than the duo were willing to concede at this point. Nevertheless, the double CD edition gathering everything from the original cassette with the omission of two cover versions — songs by The Rolling Stones and The Dean — provides an illuminating overview of the genesis of what would soon become one of the most formally advanced rock groups of the modern age. A vinyl version is due some time later this year from Time-Lag. □ (DK) Reviewed by Clive Bell, Ken Hollings, David Keenan and David Stubbs

studio musicians, but it's as precise and agile as a tap dancer — a section entitled "Steel Guns And Studio Drums" comes smoothly an effervescent surf guitar before bouncing into energetic ska punctuated by joyous yells of "hey!" "Infinite State Of Emergency" switches from a tense newswatch about political unrest to a synthetic but sensuous chorus of synthesizers and flutes. Rude Phenom Phen is, aside from a brief sketch of solo guitar experimentation, exclusively pop. And in Cambodian pop, in contrast to its Western counterpart, the ethos of retaining new chieftains the source material, but instead interlards and prolongs the pop traits experienced on the previous compilation.

# VARIOUS STREETS OF LHASA SUBLIME FREQUENCIES CD

BY CLIVE BELL

Zhang Jian, from the Beijing art collective 'm3, has recorded some robust performers on the streets of Lhasa. Tibet, toughest of the lot is a lusty three-and-a-half, being out a folk anthem while his dad struggles to keep up on the ethio flutes. No stage fright for this Tibetan lot as he stokes out a place in a sturdy building tradition that sounds, like much else here, delectably medieval. What to make of the debuting monks? A courtyard full of voices urgently appealing out scriptural arguments, embedded in the sound of clapping and whip cracking — whether this recalls gentlemen at a rendezvous or bachelors hunting in a fish market, it's a wild and boozie slice of medieval life. Unfamiliar a woman weaves her voice up a melody line, emboldened by jodeling howls at every level and turn. Flayers of the three-stringed san rlan, its body covered in python skin, strike out inspiring rhythms that would set well alongside Japan's Tsugaru shamisen or Dock Baggar's Virginia banjo. Gentler music comes from a group of users, whose chant is bounced along by their thrilling bells.

Rather than record directly on the street, Zhang Jian took his performers to a quieter park, bought food and drink, and taped them at length. So they all remain nameless and, in keeping with the Sublime Frequencies house style, information is scarce or non-existent. While it's fantastic that we can hear these recordings at all, there's frustration in not being told what these songs are, what their words mean and what their function was before they were pressed into service as street-basking material.

# VECTORS MONITORING THE BLIND MAJOR APEALBUM PRODUCTIONS CD

BY KEN HOLLINGS

Vectorspace is one of the many identities assumed by musician, sound engineer and frequent contributor to Metal Hammer Israel, Moe Apealbaum, who has also spent time with such outfits as the Vultures, Molekron and IWR, plus triest beats behind the desk for Marc Almond and Death In June. A dark assemblage of tracks recorded between 1999 and 2001, *Monitoring The Blind* is all prowling ambience and jittery splatters into grey spectrum of electronic sound. Opening "New Art" is an oppressive piling up of dub echoes and rattling percussion under a steadily mediated clutch of assimilated tones, its evenly paced eruptions seem almost welcoming when compared with the bleakly frozen

structures that follow. The glacial writhing at the heart of "The Abyss", for example, suggests the first scribe strings of some infernal, being squeezed into existence by the pressures exerted upon it. "Bird" is a muffled withdrawal of the senses, a shutting down of synaptic activity.

The majority of compositions dispense with any kind of rhythmic framework as all the more effective for it. When beats do intrude, as on "Renewal Of The Mind" and "No Way To Deny The Dream", things tend to feel little safer and more familiar. You find yourself waiting for the next excursion into alien terrain to begin. Listening to Apealbaum shedding a single human breath into the cavernous nothing of "Renewal Of The Mind" is, by contrast, a far more unsettling proposition. It would be interesting to see when further explorations of this nature might take him.

# MERI VON KLEINSMID EX VIVO MIMICROGRAM CD

BY JULIAN COWLEY

Dr pup, Meri Von Kleinsmid looks a fascinating prospect — born in LA, resident in Seattle; trained in flute, classical piano, history of Western music and ethnomusicology; active for 15 years as a sound artist and experimental musician, during which time she has resided in Chicago and Cambridge, UK and has taken up membership of the Australasian Computer Music Association, the Canadian Electroacoustic Community and the Chinese Music Society of North America. She has collaborated on an earlier CD, *Searching For The Inverse Square*, with Alex Keller. Ex Vivo has a track named after Norwegian casks, complete with a Nordic expository note that's unhelpful to non-speakers, and perhaps also to those who speak it. The note appended to "The Rats In The Wall", reads "Uhh...rrh...chchch...". Another track, "Des Ventes Ecolodier", presumably takes its title from a tale by German Romantic writer ETA Hoffmann. The commentary, skipping this, refers to "A" composition crafted from purely electronic sources. Inspired by anxiety and the emptiness of space?

If the notes seem designed to puzzle or provoke, the music too has an air of patience. "Spheres Of Interest", a "Fantasia from the depths of space", is banal, anachronistic so-f electronic. "Five-Word Fantasy", adding digital stutter to samples of German and British voices, is a heavy-handed lurch into the sound-text field. "Disseval Effect" borrows sounds of "birds, a Taiwanese tin can once filled with water, traffic noise, and the voice of the composer" in a smog of interference. "Tele Chatter" playfully parodies Paul Lansky's fine electroacoustic composition of that title. This is not to say that there aren't some worthwhile moments in the course of these eight tracks. Pastiche, intended or otherwise, can be entertaining, for a while.

# DAVID S WARE LIVE IN THE WORLD THIRTY BAR CD/CD

BY PAUL FREEMAN

David S Ware is almost certainly the pre-eminent living free jazz saxophonist. That should mean more than it does. Trouble is, he doesn't tour much, and it's hard to build a reputation with such albums alone. That's why this monomaniac, awe-inspiring document is so essential, and fortuitous. Over three CDs, Ware

slowly spins in the spotlight, revealing every aspect of his magisterial vision. The set's opening glimmer (each disc features a different drummer) only serves to emphasise the timeless consistency of his achievement.

Premenors of Ware can be heard on albums like Sonny Rollins's *Our Man In Jazz* and *Ad Libitum* Run Down and Joe Henderson's *Inner Unity*. He's also indebted to late Coltrane and Pharoah Sanders. But his huge, thick tones and sense of harmonics are second to none, and he's surrounded himself with a group that's about as ignorable as a Porcupine drummer. The Ware quartet in full run are beyond jazz, operating on a par with Black Sabbath circa 1972, Miles Davis circa 1975, or Black Flag circa 1984. The music is a physical force, driving the very structure of the disc in which it's played.

Disc one, from 1998, features Suse Barri on drums, along with pianist Matthew Ship and bassist William Parker. The set focuses on tracks from the group's then-new major label debut, *Go See The World*, opening with a marathon take on "Aquarian Soul", a modal epic from 1992's *Right Off II*. The 32 minute running time gives each group member a turn in the spotlight. Sadly, Parker's bowed solo abandons the quartet's hypnotic groove, diving instead into a mournful exercise in gasp and scrape. There was a reason Jimmy Garrison's solos usually preceded the late Coltrane group's epic blowouts, rather than slamming the brakes on midway through them. The rest of the pieces are volcanic and every player is pushed to their limits. Taken together — assembled as an *Ex Vivo* set — the total 95 minute experience is overwhelming, making the listener's heart pound and head spin.

Disc two, recorded in 2003, finds Harrie Drake behind the kit — one time occasion that boasts repeating. Drake is the most groove-oriented player Ware's ever used, but this doesn't constrain the group in solo jazz or hard bop territory. Indeed, the saxophonist must rhythmically ground the album. *Surrendered*, is completely grooved. The five pieces performed are taken instead from Ware's earliest releases — the audience is taken all the way back to *Passage To Music* and *Great Bliss* to hear reworkings of "Udder's Path", "Serfless Compassion" and other semi-mythical, wamp-on-one-blues. Drake hits a high-point, as loud in the mix as some Metal drummers. This is the most aesthetically rudimentary, too. Having Drake screaming away seems to inspire Ware and his bandmates to dig in deep, hurling chunks of sound in all directions.

Disc three is a live take on Sonny Rollins's *Freedom Suite* which the quartet interpreted on a 2003 studio album. There, Rollins's original was expanded from 15 minutes to 40, breaking it into four movements along the way. Live, the piece becomes an hour-long workout, stretching further and further away from the original's swinging, melodic understatement. The first movement alone is as long as Rollins's 1958 studio take. Every member of the quartet takes a solo or two, and as on the studio version, Matthew Ship's role is the most interesting, since there was no piano on the original. He, Parker and drummer Guillermo E Brown hammer in place into the fairly best drumming of his recent Blue Savas discs. When Ware returns, though, the music heads skyward in triumph, never looking back, its remaining 30 minutes made up of screams, red-

splitting harmonics and phrases repeated, marimba-like and at lightning speed.

Until recently, Ware's studio albums came in two classes. One places his key technique at the service of transcendental rhythm section warping (Right Off I, Third Ear Rebooting, Duo, Surrendered and Freedom Suite). The other lets that lung-busting technique off its chain, beginning each track with a singsong melody before the screaming, jagged harmonics commences (Cryptology, Earthquake, Gospelized, and Go See The World). Recently, he's experimented with electronics and strings, on *Comet And Planets And Threads* (which owed more to Alice Coltrane than John). There's a tentative aboutness about these records, as though he's driving a nail without a map. These live concerts find the old Ware back at full strength. An unrelenting display of passion and power, live in the World can be exhausting. Listening to all three discs in a row isn't recommended. But each concert is an entry into his self-created, post-Coltrane free jazz universe, and that's a place worth visiting as often as possible.

# SAUL WILLIAMS SAUL WILLIAMS WICHITA CD

BY TOM PERCHARD

Saul Williams's *Amethyst Rock Star* (2001) came out when the performance poet and actor was still hot from his exceptional live performance in the film *Slam*. That first record, produced by Rick Rubin and released via Sony, was a high-profile project. Perhaps this album isn't — Williams now shares an underground label with HMC favourites like *Slip Party* and *The Bore* (as well as nobody's favourite *Notorious B.I.G.*). But there's still plenty of glossy guitars and power drumming in Rubin's rock-nap mood. That's only one style out of several here, though — the tracks that don't sound like rock feature a kind of electro dub, or lounge jazz, indeed anything besides straight hip-hop. Williams's mind is set on that music from his first words, but the release is about here, halfway through the album, the piano song "Black Space", suddenly introduces a "Bridge Is Over" beat. It's an Old School groove, but then it's essentially an extended critique of Hip-Hop's New School scene. "Telegram to HipHop: Dear HipHop/Slam," Williams writes on "Telegram". "This shit has gone too far/Slam! That has polluted the music and its culture." These inform all interested parties that casual elements that have been included into the art of *Amethyst*.

On that track more than any other, Williams's textual play and performance philosophy owe more to the poets of the Black Arts Movement than any MC. He can be a polemicist in the Black Arts style, but his sermonising isn't merely pariah. On "African Student Movement", the punning refrain "Where my niggers at?" triggers a black diaspora status report which begins in Africa, moves through Port-au-Prince and ends in Brooklyn. The closer to home Williams focuses, the more uncomfortable he has charges. And his observations, on several tracks here, and elsewhere in his work, he constructs a deft window in his opposition to plays rap scenes. Better by pieces fertile in the stars than in the streets, certainly — but to repeat — with the mythology isn't necessarily the way to engage with what's real. □

# Avant Rock

Reviewed by Tom Ridge

## AZITA ENANTIOTROMIA DRAG CITY CD/LP

This is a far cry from Azita Yousefi's past as a member of Chicago's Scissor Girls. The enroute No Wave-influenced bassist has switched to piano and written a series of elliptical songs characterized by jazzy hauntings and slippery, subtle structures. Accompanied by Tortoise's John McVie on drums and Isotope 217's Matthew Lux on bass throughout, with occasional contributions from Rob Moxley on conns and guitarist Jeff Parer, Azita makes the most of her material, stretching her innard vocals to meet the relative sophistication of the arrangements. There's a notable contrast between the rough-edged delivery of her singing and the slickness of the music. As a vocalist she only really manages various degrees of strobidity, but this also gives her songs some welcome individuality which might otherwise be lost amid the fluid interplay of the musicians. There remains a nagging sense of evisceration, where Azita's lyrics seem to be alluding to very personal concerns, only to fail to get their across with clarity. Even so, Enantiotromia is never less than interesting.

## CYANN & BEN HAPPY LIKE AN AUTUMN TREE GOODMUSIC DISCS CD

Cyann & Ben's published list of all time favourite records includes albums by Godspeed! Wec Black Emperor, Raohhead and Pink Floyd. The second release from this French outfit (the group is completed by an additional two members) accurately reflects these tastes without really managing to synthesise them into an original sound. Instead it's more a case of ticking off the beats punched from their influences. So you get some anachronous rhythms topped off with falsetto vocals à la Raohhead, a touch of pulsating Floydian space rock, and some dramatic Godspeed-style noise crescendos. The end result is some admirably concise and accomplished non-Prog songs, even if they lack that spark of creativity which might elevate them from carefully composed imitations into something altogether more individual.

## ENTRANCE WANDERING STRANGER SKETCHBOOK CD

22 year old American troubadour Guy Bialek is another in a longfiling list of young underground musicians to delve into his country's folk and blues lineage for inspiration. His second album as Entrance sticks pretty closely to established forms but then works on them, stretching them to their limits in lengthy, pained back songs characterised by his youthful, quavering voice and confidently direct guitar picking. It's a frequently useful combination of Jeff Buckley's youthful veneer (if not his eclectic scope), Jack White's raw passion and Devendra Banhart's lyrical richness. Entrance build formidable narratives out of basic structures, allowing time more than the simple twang of his guitar and the weatherproofing of his voice to deliver and then reiterate the message to often

dramatic effect, as on the epic "Lonesome Road" and the confessional travesty of "Derling".

## JESU JESU HYPER HEAD INDUSTRIES CD

Justin Broadrick's son of Godflesh is the appropriately named Jesu. With this successor project he marries Industrial intensity to a more corporeous sense of melody and cloaks it in an all-encompassing atmosphere of gloomy majesty. Some of the best-reviewed and most melancholy spirituality strongly recalls early Lou. Though Broadrick bolsters such sentiment with down out drags, riffs, machine rhythms and the equally drone of guitar noise. The vocals have a detached, semi-submerged quality, but their very insubstantiality heightens the music's sheer physical impact. Part of the technique here is to stretch an idea to breaking point, ramming the music slowly, insatiably home with a kind of dumbout, processional inevitability. Some faint comfort may be had from the vaguely redemptive quality that's traceable in the midst of this sluggishness, but then I don't think comfort figures largely in Broadrick's scheme of things.

## KLANG NO SOUND IS HEARD BLAST FIRST PETTE CD

Guitars Donna Matthews's post-Elastica group delivers an initially unassuming but ultimately authoritative collection of quietly shimmering songs, characterised by selfconsciously undercooked production values which accentuate their sparse charm. With minimalist hissing rhythms, brittle, jazzy guitar melodies and just the right degree of lyrical nonchalance, No Sound Is Heard quietly lays Matthews's musical ghosts to rest by accentuating the positive virtues of unfussy arrangements, sketchy experimentalism and not looking like you're trying too hard. By privileging a kind of textual minimalism, the trio of Matthews, bassist Isabel Walder and drummer Kenzie Henshuk achieves a neat standard of perfection that effectively says just a less-is-more dictum.

## MY JAZZY CLOUD I INSIST CLIPPING MUSIC CD

Portland's Damien Mungus fits between styles with a bewitching restlessness, to the extent that many of the tracks here seem to be strictly outlived at the editing stage, as if he's suddenly lost interest and needs to move on. When he's not indulging his abstract instincts with scorching sound collages, Mungus performs skewed folk songs, picking out minimalist patterns on his acoustic guitar and mumbling his lyrics in a husky whisper. In these he adds a background of overlapping voice ideas, glitches and crooning riffs. He also has a weakness for chimes and harmonies, which drop up intermittently amid the general chaos. While there are some high points, chiefly arising from the clearly hard workmanship of Mungus's songs, this experimental folk-electronica has a mushy, soft center which leaves behind an impression of vague indeterminacy rather than intrigue.

## PARK ATTACK LAST DROP AT HIDE OUT OGASAR CD/LP

From the noisily deconstructed guitar and hysterically bleated vocals of "Delta Smelter", it's clear that subtlety will not be a feature of this Glasgow trio's debut EP "Come Baby Blues" contains a kind of gasping, falsetto vocal which suggests an attempt at a soul ballad before the instrumental picks up again for the punnelling, shambling "I'm Gonna Storm The Citadel Of Your Wretchedness!". It's always a warning sign when a group's song titles are entertaining, suggesting the songs themselves may be less so. But Park Attack's energetic art rock mess just about manages to hang together for the duration, though God help them if they ever attempt a whole album. It's reassuring that inspired amateurism still has its part to play, and that beneath a high energy, low competence shell, Park Attack's dissonant pop songs provide a gleefully manic route to state of the art, alternative pop professionalism.

## SILO 10 SILO 10 DOINGHUNGLE BUZZ CD

SiLo 10's name is somewhat literal, since this Texas trio's debut album was in fact recorded inside a grain silo with a mobile recording unit. Given the setting's acoustics, the music of Hansen Rivera and James Sido relies heavily on reverb for its atmospheric charge. Much of it is based around sustained guitar drones, accompanied by the garbled background patter of electronics, but then it slowly blooms into semi-abstract melodies, partially submerged beneath an Ambient haze. These transformations are repeated throughout the album, with distant guitar passages floating over overlapping reverb effects and booming echoes. At its heart lies a simple, if not formulaic, approach – its repetitiveness is its strength, as themes are quietly reinforced with a dramatic, semibambulant insistence.

## THE SKYGREEN LEOPARDS LIFE & LOVE IN SPARROW'S MEADOW JAGJAGGWAR CD

Bay Area duo Denovan Quinn and Glenn Donaldson conveniently inherit a microscopic, pastoral folk universe of their own making. From the gaudy picture book collage of the album's cover art to the arcane mythological lyrics, there is a deeply otherworldly milieu which really demands to be taken purely on its own terms. These are slightly ramshackle, amiably acoustic, shuffling cosmic folk songs with reedy voices raised in harmony, singing odds to the "Belle Of The Woodman's Autumn Ball" and "Egyptian Rosemary". On one level it all sounds terribly precious, a mere wisp of substance which might float away into oblivion at short notice. But it is actually grounded by the primitive charm of the arrangements – The Skygreen Leopards just about carry it off with enough charm to best its subject matter. It may be just a bit too saccharine for some tastes.

## THE SPACIOUS MIND DO YOUR THING BUT DON'T TOUCH OURS GOODMUSIC IN A COUNTRYMAN CD

The label claims to be "dedicated to the sounds of outlaw number boogie". Coupled with the knowledge that this was originally recorded live in a commune in the middle of a Swedish forest in 1999, you'd be forgiven for expecting it to sound at least a little outthere. Actually it's a rather ordinary throw together of some extended space rock jams. The individual tracks tend to seem to have been literally imposed onto a single incoherently changing piece of music, and while the shifts in mood are themselves seamlessly accomplished, the moods themselves are not sufficiently distinct from one another for it to really matter. Driven by a basic rhythmic section of bass guitar and drums, the music is then coloured in with swathes of keyboard and the siren call of echoing wah-wah guitars. And that's about it. Nothing really stands out from the mass of sound, just a collection of loopy, stoned grooves and peppy solos.

## SUBARACHNOID SPACE THE RED VEIL STRANGE ATTRACTORS AUDIO HOUSE CD

This San Francisco group has gone through enough line-up changes for it to barely resemble the outfit which set the ball rolling in 1996. With founder member Mason Jones now taking a backseat producer's role, only guitarist Melinda Jackson survives from their early days. Consequently the emphasis is less on mid-paced psychedelic improvisations and more on jagged, skanking rhythms and a more honed, harsher approach. The opening "Honorable Mention" and the following "Dumbourous" are strong examples of this shift to harder-edged rock dynamics. That said, the group seem to drift back towards its jamming origins with the title track's monolithic heaviness and the nodding rhythms of the closing "Duster", leaving the impression that this fallback position is perhaps compromising their development. However, even on these lagging workouts their music sustains a fierce energy level and builds into a relentless mass of rhythm and fury.

## WE ACEDIASTS PRE ACEDIASTS MESHKEY CD

We Acediasts are a Japanese group with an expat New York guitarist playing badly tethered, abrasive, avant punk-funk. The first two tracks were produced by DFA in New York in 2001 and sound like edgier precursors to The Rapture, with their co-opting of dubby Bk-style basslines, scatchy guitars and Mosko Takamoto's raring vocals. The abrasiveness of the playing is offset by the muffled warmth of DFA's production, which emphasises the shuddering grooves to good effect, leaving the group sounding at once decentering and on the site. The remaining six tracks were recorded in Tokyo, the premiere year by the Pre Acediasts days of Justin Simon and Takamoto and sound harsher and more pained back, with pulsating grooves, piercing electronic noises and jabbering, echoing vocals. □

# Critical Beats

Reviewed by Philip Sherburne

## A GUY CALLED GERALD TO ALL THINGS WHAT THEY NEED KT CD

To short the rise and fall of UK dance music over the past decade and a half, up until UK Garage and the birth of Grime, you could just trace the outline of A Guy Called Gerald's career — from his Acid House origins in 808 State through the ethno-funk of "Woodoo Ray," to Hardcore and Jungle and downtempo, ironically even as a number of Gerald misses are slated for release in 2005, offering a critical reappraisal of this history, the artist himself has moved to Berlin, along with the rest of the electronic music world. *To All Things What They Need*, Gerald's first album in five years, draws deeply on a wide swathe of techno memory. The records a mixed bag — on tracks like "Millennium Sanhedrin" (featuring Ursula Rucker) and "Strangest Changes" (featuring Finley Quayle), Gerald seems so caught up in full-spectrum sound design that he forgets to push the music forward, even when employing drum 'n' bass techniques. The skittering "Warning" sounds like the work of a broadcast artist who just discovered Autechre's *Arbore*, but deep techno cuts like "Be Love" reveal the bleasty atmospherics of classic R&B/Apollo recordings, and the insipidly-taut, string-stuffed "Pump" is an energetic House track that throws odds ideas of "progression" to pay tribute to a fully formed genre.

## ADULT DUME THRELL JOCKEY 12"

Detroit's Adult, comprised of neish photographer Nicola Kuperus and her partner Adam Lee Miller, have always gravitated toward the industrial side of electro, but they've never infused their rudimentary machine drumming and squawking synthesizers with this much out and out raw. Kuperus has also never sounded as much like Suzanne as she does here, especially on "The End," where she treats the actives like a sonic stakes and ladders genre. Indeed, the whole thing, from its dissonant guitars to its tiny rhythms, sounds like nothing so much as an outtake from *The Scorn*. On "DUME" and "Hearing Impaired," gaudy synthesizers recall both the British Electronic

Foundation and Cabaret Voltaire's early attic experiments, walking a fine line between pop clarity and total analogue meltdown.

## [APENDIXES SHUFFLE SAW SAW SOUP ORAC 12"

## CARO MY LITTLE PONY ORAC 12"

Seattle's Disc-label looks off its year with two strong releases. Drawing upon well-developed strains of German minimal Techno, Disc continues to establish its unique sound — and, in the process, confirms its place as one of North America's most vital techno labels. Caro is Disc head Randy Jones, and his "My Little Pony" is one sexy little showcase, totting along over a dirty flying bassline, accompanied by subtly wooded spoken lyrics and punctuated by insistent keyboard fire-ups. Ben Newie sends down the funk, emphasizing the track's creases and cracks, while Disc's stalwart Bruno Promatto adds some polish on the tackle, in line with Insay Behlmer's like Luciano, London's Beckett & Taylor put their own incompromisable touch to their remix, turning the percussion into a outburst of funk in an earthquake. [Appendixes Shuffle's "Saw Saw Soup," like Promatto, plays with a beeper sound, flash with swollen chords and reet with gash stasis, and its raspy vocal hook is catchy as hell. The Whymony Brothers' Robot Whymie, true to form, winds up his wrists and goes drumming on a rubber mat. His percussive references run the gamut from churning steam-wheelers to high-stakes games of pick-up sticks, exploring every last sliver of white noise.

## ABE DUQUE SO UNDERGROUND IT HURTS ORAC 12"

An Ecuadorian living in Queens, New York whose music gets more play in Europe — and who has long been closely affiliated with Munich's Disko B label — Abe Duque is not so much underground as groundless, a textbook example of techno's global reach. His new album's title derives from the rejected principles of its contents' initial distribution, pressed up as 12"s on Abe Duque Records, manufactured without

sleeves or labels, and released without the press copies or DJ promos that are a staple of even the most underground contemporary dance music. The "What Happened" single became a word-of-mouth smash anyway, and hearing its infectious Acid baseline and Blue Stutter's posar in a dying club culture, it's no wonder why. Underground's 13 tracks are all variations on a theme: electro-infused House, indebted to Chicago but not afraid to nod to Heavy Metal's blast beats or Ambient Techno's worship of the dawn. On tracks like "Acid" and "Champagne", there's no fucking around, just pleasure-principled devotion to the synesthetic potential of a particularly resonant synthesizer line or a stare that crunches like soft-shell crab. If this is what hurt feels like, by all means bring the pain.

## LAURENT GARNIER THE CLOUD MAKING MACHINE MUTE CD

France's best known ambassador of Techno changes course considerably on his fourth album, moving away from the high intensity emphasis of his DJ sets and the Chicago and Detroit influences of records like 1997's *30* and 2000's *Unreasonable Behaviour*. Tracks like "Huis Clos", fleeced with flamenco and North African vocals, can drag, wallowing in self-conscious "musicality" better reserved for a Berkeleysoundtrack. And the garage rock of "I Wanna Be Working For My Plane" is an unlikely cross between early Sonic Youth and Two Lone Swordsman's sea-men experiment. [Some lyrics — like "I'm waiting for my plane/I'm heading off to Spain" — just don't need to be recorded, Evac] But Garnier's Ambient experiments, as on the Rhodes-detailed title track, or the foghorning "9:01 9:06", which offsets a slow-burning garage melody with typewriter-inspired percussion, show that his time off the floor hasn't been wasted.

## MELOBOY HOT LOVE MUTE 12"

DI all this songs on Kompa's landmark Kompakt 100 compilation, which featured the Cologne label members polking up the family fables, some caused more comment — and occasional consternation — than Justin

Körner's mauling of one of Wolfgang Voigt's Freiland tracks with a custom cover of Marc Bolan's "Hot Love". Licensed by Mute, the tune is made available here as a single. Mimicking T. Rex's Country-rock shuffle, a goofy-footed polka beat stomps up and down in time with synthesized accordion huffing, surrounded by the cheery imitation strings available. Meloboy, whoever he is, sings Bolan's lyrics with a sample gender twist — "He ain't no Arch/And I love the way he twist" — in a telescoping falsetto. Wolfgang Voigt, as Wasserman, turns the track into a stomping, Spierdier-ready slide of 4/4 brutality in which Meloboy's ridiculously blustful vocals provide an inconceivable counterpoint to churning Techno beats recorded in an entirely different key. International Pony's DJ Kaze mediates the middle ground, with ping-ponging aspeccies and glossy handclaps serving as a precious display box for Meloboy's affected vocals. Kaze's rendition is available in two sizes — four and a half minutes for the papets, and an Acid-etched 11 minute epic for true hedonists.

## SYCLOPS MOM, THE VIDEO BROKE TIRK 12"

Maurice Fulton is probably the most rhythmically inventive producer working in electronic dance music right now. In contrast to the unhinged funk of his work in MUJ with vocalist Mutamu Karaman, which channels Acid, disco, experimental Techno and hard rock in equal measure, here he steps back from the brink to prove that when he wants, he can also simply pound out a rocksteady beat. The star of "Mom, The Video Broke" is a monster drum beat, cushioned in stadium-sized awns. If Billy Squier's "Big Beat" sample hadn't been available for Dione Rascol to use in his "Fix Up, Lock Sharp", Dione easily could have borrowed from Snyder's drumming for the same effect. Adding a glitzy atomic Lord's worth of robot blazes and a triflingly loud buzz-bomb of a baseline, Fulton turns the whole thing into a kind of apocalyptic take on disco. "The E.Ticket", utilizing a similar style of drumming, nevertheless shows Fulton's sensitive side, bursting with organs, strings and even harp. □

# DWIGHT ASHLEY FOUR

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## 20 THE WIRE

# Electronica

Reviewed by Chris Sharp

## CO iCOMO MUSIC/SH CO

Funkily aware instrumental HipHop, all the way from Poland, CO manages to pull off the trick of combining good-humored, buoyant beats with genuinely moving and audacious textures, and he does so without deviating from his own parallel universe mythology. It's the work of one Matek Kugelski, and while, sonically speaking, his debut album is a little rough round the edges, it also displays enough inescapable inventiveness to make that a trifling concern. Opener "Capo Humano" sets the tone — head-nodding beats mixed with the kind of giddy, burgeoning faurground noise in which Nari's Lloyd Rice used to specialise, and iCOMO continues along these lines for the rest of the hour. Along the way jittery blackened sine tones, scrawny electro keyboard stabs, lurching surf-rock, society Old School arcade noise and much more besides are all folded into the mix — Kugelski even includes a thoughtful three minutes of silence two thirds of the way through, which allows the disorientated listener to enjoy his compositional. It's simply welcome, too.

## COMATONE E-50 FERRAL MEDIA CO

Greg Selzer is a man whose entire life revolves around precise adjustments and tiny increments of sound. A mastering engineer by profession, he follows a day spent tweaking EQ and compression settings with evenings spent in front of the computer that serves him as a recording studio. Despite this self-imposed isolation — compounded by the fact that he's based outside of Sydney in rural New South Wales — Selzer's music is fine and imaginative, overcoming the occasionally clunky rhythm programming to find its own voice.

The opening "A Bird Is Not A Ghost" highlights his knack for elegant melody, and the following "Net For Years" is lightened by the kind of Speck & Spelt/Speck Hawking reboobal rerecorded over-familiar by Radiohead, it's also redeemed by abstracted electronic squawking and brisk percussive patterns, and ends up perfectly balanced between vigor and melancholy. The album's counterpart is an aided trilogy comprising "Trepier" and "Can I Hear the Keys To The Robot (Parts 1 & 2)". It flows smoothly from uneasy silence to frantic, then flickerlike beats to raw, achy feedback — the overall effect is genuinely disquieting.

## EMIL DE WAAL EMIL DE WAAL PLUS R&B CO

Fascinating, brain-scrambling music from a completely invisible source — this is the kind of thing that could only happen in Scandinavia. Emil De Waal is first and foremost a jazz drummer, whose prolific career as a session musician in his native Denmark has seen him working alongside any number of inspired international celebrities and holding together the house band on a string of national TV variety

shows. Hardly the sort of background that you might expect behind an album of such quixotic strangeness, but Emil De Waal Plus was brought into being by De Waal's day job as associate producer at the Rhythmic Music Conservatory in Copenhagen. Despite being recorded to hard disc in Denmark and New York, decorated by an array of acolytes, and heavily manipulated on both sides of the Atlantic, these compositions retain a surprising fluency. The staidly piano that opens "Epitaphs" has a chromatic sadness reminiscent of Beethoven, but that's as meritable as things get, as De Waal immediately erupts on a colorful parade of styles and sounds. "Struktur" is a rollicking percussive gale storm through with Middle Eastern figures and frenzied guitar, "Tschak" a jaunty Caribbean lode fested with distortion. It's unclassifiable but no less fun for that.

## FEED FEEDER FEEDER FRENZY CHRYSLER

London's EMI/ate label started operations in the most sumptuous of fashions last year, making a modest string of releases available in tactile handmade packaging. Most of their output so far has been readily experimental, with a tangible industrial influence, but while the release is hardly pop music, it doesn't major on malice either in the way that Sudden Impact's *Look Left* did. Instead, *Feeder Feeder* — the nom de guerre of Julian Doyle — offers a series of down beat rhythm tracks whose echoing, nervy spaces are surprisingly evocative of alienation and political despair, despite their sparseness and simplicity.

Track titles like "Colateral" and "Presidential Wisdom" hint at Doyle's agenda, and the record as a whole supplies an oblique commentary on the Bush presidency and the war on terror through its use of sampled news broadcasts and political soundbites. The vinyl and edulcorated of Crass, say, or even Michael Moore are strangely absent. Feed Feeder's sterile, lo-fi revolutions express little more than vague anxiety and disconnected impotence. Which, come to think of it, is about as much as most people probably feel.

## HOPEN WE ARE SINGING FOR HURRAYS AIRBORNE CO

Hopen is Childe Grangie, a producer based in Geneva who, with his second album, is reunited with the French label that released some of his earliest recordings back in 2001. His music is impossible to categorise — indeed, it's only just qualified as music at all. We Are Singing For Hurrays is a large, limpid, constantly modulating drone through a quixotic succession of moods and soundscapes. It could be the soundtrack to some handmade avant garde documentary or an attempt at a surreal collage, an enigmatic corpse in sound — or it could just be the noises the poor guy hears in his head. Whatever, it's an intriguing and unsettling

experience. Occasionally, there are moments that you might dismiss as incompetent attempts to make dance music if it wasn't for the context — the lazy backbeat of "La Rue Conque La Requiescent", the Radio noise that opens "Welching Radio", for example. But these components melt away like everything else does, nudged into the past by the restless flow of ideas. A man repeats the word "fucking", heels clack against a pavement, fragments of HipHop scratching, a clock ticking and all the time amorphous swarms of sonic material drifting in and out of focus. It's fascinatly peckish stuff.

## KYO ICHINOSE LONTANO CUBIC MUSIC CO

Like his erstwhile labelmate Keichi Sugimoto (aka Faurcort), the latter Mirror album was one of the electronic highlights of 2004. Kyō Ichinose has an instinct for conjuring maximum emotional impact from minimum means. Lontano is his second album (*The Machines Of My* appeared in 2002) and, as you might expect given its title (the Italian for From A Distance, as used in musical scores), it majors on lowly piano strains and sweet, elusive murmurs which hover at the edge of perception. Ichinose also makes music for art installations, and he has a string of collaborations with film makers and architects under his belt. His classical training is evident from the way that his music skilfully blends electronic biases with classical instrumentation — deviously bowed viola, violin and cello offer a warm counterpart to the digitally processed sounds at the forefront of the mix.

The four numbered Lontano pieces that form the album's spine confirm this success of touch, progressing, stage by tentative stage, from the crystalline, processed reverberations of the opening "40" to the busy, hushed ecosystem of "83". The album closes with "A Mixed Story", for some quartet, piano and echoing voice noise — it's a brief, poignant thrumby through with debt economy, somewhat encompasses all that has gone before.

## PITA GET OFF HAPNA CO

Pita, aka Mega mainstay and serial collaborator Peter Reinberg, has always had a keen appreciation of the therapeutic powers of noise. It's an aesthetic which strikes the listener with redoubled force on this collection, peered together for the Swedish Hapna label from recordings made over the last two or three years. In the space, chilly tones of the feeding order "Bernol", the following, charmingly titled "Live Shift On A Shelf" swings in with a swirling, high pitched swirl of noise which has the physical impact of a bucket of snow in the face. As you acclimatise to this avalanche of hyper-distorted information, the frenetic kaleidoscope resolves into strangely moving, penumbra shapes — waitlike chimes tuning and swaying in the digital blizzard. "Reseg 95" is considerably more direct, a

splintered, low frequency shudder, panned vividly from channel to channel and throwing off the bleakest of electronic shrapnel as it is propelled senselessly from side to side. But redemption is never far away. Gradually the tide of noise recedes and a hailing Old School arpeggio emerges, summing the seething presence of the Belleville Trio into this heightened landscape. This closing "Rebus" is an epoch of ringing, unweaving, high frequency sadness, glacial tones dancing delicately with their harmonic shadows before fading to gentle, welcoming silence.

## POLA MIME PLOC CO

Well, it's not exactly breaking new ground but, like all the releases that I've encountered on the elegantly presented Ploc label, this deserves a place in the racks. It's the debut release from a young Japanese producer whose real name remains tantalisingly obscure, but despite this daggered anonymity anyone encountering Mime would have a pretty fair start at identifying the contents of her record collection, so difficult is the obscurity paid to be brought, howling tones of pome period Mite Plateaux.

Pola is clearly one-familiar with the works of Macanota and SND, but that's no bad thing, and the shimmering restraint of his deftly outlined work has an irresistible appeal of its own. Moreover, the presence of a piece called "Peechie" adds to the aura of self-deprecating charm. In fact, all the tracks have one word French titles — "Céle", for example, is pristine Macanota, packed with sumptuously blurring digital caresses, while "Dimanche" is a delicately fraught elegance, fluctuating edgily around a single, serene chord.

## UPLAND OBLITERATED RESTER CO

This is the second album from Knut Ruid, who started recorded as Upland back in 2002. Ruid works in a day care centre for mentally handicapped people in his native Oslo; he not only composes the tense, febrile, chopped up soundscapes that populate his albums. Maybe it's a form of therapy — music like this requires a watchmaker's attention to detail, capturing, tuning and framing an infinity of digital fragments, priming each into its allotted space on the sequencer's remorseless timeline. And perhaps it's because Ruid is so focused on the minutiae of his music that the bigger picture creeps up unnoticed — shadowy, nocturnal emotions that loom, glideshow, between and beyond the meticulous precision of the beats. Only occasionally does he succumb to the temptation to add his own colour to this composition — the delicate flickers of "Field Interference" as a case in point, as are the aural flickers of "On". Its significant that these are the weakest tracks on the album. Elsewhere, the machinery that he sets into motion brings forth his own infinitely more plausible emotions. □



# HipHop

Reviewed by Derek Walmsley

## COUNT BASS-D BEGBORROWSTEAL RAMPAGE/ATLACK CD

I love HipHop albums with 16 tracks that clock in at under half an hour—it suggests a certain type of don't-give-a-damn, cavalier breeziness that a songy lackey at all levels of the game. The latter inference is the really understated (and he knows it) Nashville-based producer/rapper Count Bass-D resembles a Guided By Voices album, all half-cooked ideas, sketches for future references and shades of greatness.

He's a full-on deconstructer from his unhappy stint on Sony, and he hasn't really forgotten the cold shoulder promotion of *Re-Life Crisis*. "Straight out the bedroom, straight out the homelessness," he mutters on "Dawology," a commercial-length rant about how he "fell off the music business/Back to digging ditches." "Drug Abuse," the brainfarted "Dollar Bill" and the slandering "Kumbuka Uta Penda Pasa (Put Dubs)" are as wacky playing as anything his inner Madlib does, while the low-fuel raps of "Low Batters" finds him bragging, "Rody Rite is the King of Midz/Count Bass-D, rize this shit like the 'Mingus Sound' carcass from a cock tale out an Internet talk, with the Court warring, 'I tell y'all Aze Jits told Mingus/Aze said supposed to make nobody music,' before he gets bored with it all and looses the elegant piano track from Aretha Franklin's "Young, Gifted And Black." "New Edition Karaoke" is exactly what it sounds like. Absolutely essential—and I never say that. (Hus Hus)

## J-ZONE GREATER LATER FAT BEATS 12"

In a recent interview, the foul-mouthed, ill-mannered, grandfather-loving rapper J-Zone professed a scholastic love for overcooked Texas appetizers: The Dead Squad. The Squad stood out on Rap-A-Lot's mean-spirited roster. They had a name he called "I Can't See Rust" (one of their numbers was actually billed) before disappearing, more or less.

The standout single from J's latest, A Job Ain't Nothin' But Work, finds the rapper fulfilling one of his few PG dreams as he trades bars with Odd Squad (and Wre Invariant) Devin Duts. "Greater Later" recounts an uneventful day in the life of each rapper, with the only salvo being the realization that things can only get better. Devin, known for his extreme love of weed, lists his broken car, an empty refrigerator and cold weather as reasons for a very poor day, though it doesn't sound that bad as recorded with his soft, feathery voice. J's verse is a little more eventful: moosey rappers, shifty promoters and zealous meter makers are among his many foes. At W's end, an exasperated J takes the stage, scribbles and pees on the crowd. Yip, things are sure looking up. (Hus Hus)

## MAD EP EATING MOVIES AD NOBIS/AM CD

MAD EP's artist/DJ profile offers gigs providing "mad-cow," wrought from his only equipment, a

trusty laptop. Eating Movies lives up to this ambitious billing with a massive, multi-powered beat attack and an epic palette of exotic sound sources.

The album breaks into the heavy technology right from the start—"S-Cents" is a scuttling beat which moves like slow caterpillar tracks, with machine-gun percussion bursting through the maxime. For the first three tracks, the exuberant, gleaming architecture of a city commercial quarter—human presence might be lost to the vast spaces and cold angles, but the shiny textures and engineering skill are enough to take your breath away. Yet then's more to savour here than mere technical prowess, and as the album continues, cinematic and emotional depth is added to the explosive opening. "Mid-album" is a lengthy interlude of organ and string tones that has the restraint of a Bach fugue. As the album reaches "Dance's Calming Effect On A Mad Mind," the aggressive beats of the beginning are intermingled with surround-sound cooing and lighter samples guaranteed to speak out those listening on headphones on a dark, lonely street.

The presence of MC Equilibrium on some tracks is just another tandem in the mix—his contributions are constantly upstaged by the chain-sawed drums and samples in the background. With Donna Summer/Jason Forrest in attendance to duct samples on the robotic HipHop of "Live Till I Rot" and MAD EP's own improvisation group the Manhattan Gimp Project featured on "Ride, DT2902," the music is in a state of perpetual flux. Eating Movies approaches the intensity of Nu U-turn and the scale of Kevin Martin's techno Album, while never losing sight enough to allow comprehension of its full DNA.

## OU DIRTY BASTARD POPSHOTS WARD AND CHESTNUT 12"

Whatever tastes get dropped up later on in the day, this first posthumous release from ODB is as effortlessly inspired as his best work. Recorded shortly before his death, with DJ Premier on the buttons, it finds ODB in poignantly nostalgic mood over a swaggering club banger, dreaming in '86, the year that it started, although whether he's referring to his rise to fame or the crack invasion seems lost in the mists of time. DJ Dirty Moves lyrical about the essence of his quirky style—"It's OK to pop shit, but come a little different." As usual with Premier the strength is in the simplicity—here a lovely, billowing piano lead perfectly complements the slapstick belting of Dirty's delivery. The lurching songs of "PopsHots" is like the heroic battle of a drunk who's had too much but just won't go down.

## PEDESTRIAN VOLUME ONE: UNINDIAN SONGS ANTICON CD

Pedestrian struts together rough and ready Old School rap insights into an effortlessly adroit sketch of modern life. Like Buddha, Pedestrian's

moniker suggests an average Joe's perspective to contrast with HipHop's usual excesses, with vocals recalling Adonis's white trash suburban speech. The music here is a loose, laidback retro homage, cutting loose with crisp snare breaks and stomping old soul samples. Effortlessly lively on the high-stepping party cuts, the only burn notes are when Pedestrian's DJ School outcrop permits the smuggling in of the gospel hollering and squawking of his old-time preacher alter ego. Otherwise, all that's missing from UnIndian Songs is a half-speed breakdown to wave your hands in the air.

## PERCEPTIONISTS BLACK DIALOGUE DEF JUX CD

The Perceptionists are Mr LF, Akrobatik and DJ Falts One. With titles like "Let's Move" and "Party Hard," and the presence of Murphy Kunk on the latter cut, Black Dialogue is about party as well as politics. The Perceptionists promise to "rock a show that's unbelievable," warning prospective punters "whether you're in Dallas, LA or Minneapolis, prepare for the intensity of these lyrical strategists."

For The Perceptionists, it's all about showtime—bars are tossed back and forth like Run DMX, and you could imagine Mr LF's alternative patter over a modest debt to the furmire stylings of Das EFX. Fat synths and hefty anthemic horns keep up the pace, but when they pause to muse on love letters and weapons of mass destruction, the momentum drops. Still, it's hard to disagree with the diagnosis that "we'd rather teach each other to shoot chrome than to buy homes". Black Dialogue is the loud and righteous sound of HipHop's conscience.

## PETE ROCK THE SURVIVING ELEMENTS BIRD/ARCADE CD

You used to be able to distinguish a Pete Rock track by the presence of sleigh bells or fitted basslines. Nowadays, it seems like the only thing vaguely unique about the legend's productions are a sluggish swathe of haze that seem to surround them. This disc of instrumentals collects unfinished thoughts from last year's Soul Survivor if project, and it is surprisingly good. Though "My Remind Me" dips along at too quick a pace, it features a nice string glide and subtle use of AI Green. ("Pimp) Soul" chops up a searing guitar line so that it just kind of inches and bubbles along, while the heavily filtered "Smoking Room Only" is, well, self-descriptive. "Stormy Weather" appears to be one of the only tracks here that doesn't opt for handclaps or fairy tones, and that is a blessing. (Hus Hus)

## SLEW DEM PRODUCTIONS 16 BAR SLEW DEM 12"

As well as making the UK singles chart, Lethal B's UK posse cut "Forward Riddim" (aka "Pow") also caught the eye of some of the more open-minded US HipHop critics. The formula is repeated on "16 Bar," another group effort by Lethal and half a dozen of London's finest MCs,

Over a two-step Garage beat, as overwhelming and inevitable as a crowd of advancing zombies, each MC provides 16 bars of murky battle rhymes. D Double E—the loping rapper who "kicks glittersh and chooses to annoy"—stands out from the crowd, but it's the resistent, joyous repetition of MC exclamations—"Pow!", "kai-ri-ri!", "56 me, me"—that turns a generic Garage rhythm into a noble rousing party chant.

## SHA STIMULI CLAP AT YA VIRGIN 12"

25 year old brother of Maza Aor's Lord Digga, Sha Stimuli has received plaudits for his smooth, imaginative flow, but it's the music of "Clap At Ya" that does the real talking here. Its massive, looped synth refrain is as captivating as the Death Star's tractor beam, the sound fused and fattened up to carry both the bass and the mid-range. Sha's lyrical threats are almost lost behind said clap samples in the chorus, and in the mid-song breakdown, the bass drum is reduced to pleasingly ticking time back the authentic keyboard off frantically back in.

## SOLE LIVE FROM ROME ANTICON CD

The exotically titled Live From Rome is not a public confession so much as a chronicle of internal collapse. In any case, the idea of an actual live album catch-in would surely dismay Sole, whose opening track mooks the notion of music as "cheap entertainment". Live From Rome is detached from and despairing of contemporary culture, an all-out pervasive assault topped with pessimistic perfections worthy of Theodor Adorno, although Sole is lucky enough to avoid the adjectives: "If you thought I was doing off Chernsky, you can kiss my ass." Swimming in the same cold waters as Ras Kass on a messy but menacing debut, Sole On Ice, Sole's gloomy lyrics reach across the beats without ever touching the shores of calm resolution. There's genuine angst here, whether it's the references to depression or the smugly distortion that confines Sole's vocals, and the Nameless stomper "Drive By Detachment" hints at a bleak fusion of industrial aesthetics and HipHop.

## WILEY COLDER PROMO 12"

Far away from the bouancy, hyperactive productions of his AL Recordings label, the lonely percussion clank and icy snap figure of "Colder" move at a sluggish sub-HipHop pace. The vocals, however, reach a fever pitch of intensity as Roll Deep's Wiley and Riko go to war on the pervasively bleak of their sound. On beneath the "Fast to the door in the midst of the war" battle cries and there's a deep sense of human frailty—Wiley's "Somebody's got something to live for/ Other days, baby, I got nothing to live for"—suggests a similar precarious balance of self-doubt and self-assertion to Mobb Deep's creepy pre-millennium 1995 song cycle The Infamous. □



# Jazz & Improv

Reviewed by David Keenan

## ANTHONY BRAXTON SOLO (MILANO) 1979 VOL 2 LSD CD

### BRAXTON/SZABADOS/ TARASOV TRIOTONE LSD CD

The second volume of Leo's Solo (Milano) bundles a raft of beautifully evocated standards — "On Green Dolphin Street," "Hey! That Telling in Love Is Wonderful," "Hail Nelson," "Round Midnight" and "Lush Life" — with some of Braxton's most thrilling further work. The slightly rusty recording quality lends the set an eerie, dissociated feel, one that heightens the sense of lonely drama that inevitably surrounds the best of Braxton's solo work. The furthest of ideas is raped, with Braxton fitting between a convalescent, tickle-type style and a chubby, old-fashioned tone that adds a wendy nostalgic twist to much of this still challenging set.

Freddie Stone brained paired with two former Eastern Bloc musicians: drummer Vlado R. Tarasov of Russian Gipsy Jazz, and the Hungarian pianist György Szabados. Across two Szabados compositions and three group improvisations the trio transmute the smallest of musical gestures into solemn waves of folk-inspired sound with Braxton's fluttering reeds working into Szabados's rolling, melodic conceptions.

## WHIT DICKEY QUARTET COALESCENCE CLEAN FEED CD

Drummer Whit Dickey has a drooling, straight-ahead style that has as much to do with free rock rhythms as any conventional notion of swing, taking the delectable punch of Sunny Murray and lubricating it with the application of decades of accumulated post-rock thought. Although he's still best known as a member of The David S. Ware Quartet during their most ferociously intense period, recent years have seen him come into his own as a composer and bandleader. His current call is the skills of some of the New York region's free improvisers, with saxophonist Rob Brown and trumpeter Ray Campbell Jr. abetted by Joe Morris on bass. Coalescence is a powerful set, working Ornette-styled heads and Heavy Metal gospel à la Riverside Frank Wright into some wild abstractions. Morris is particularly impressive, moving well beyond any notion of simply transposing his travelling guitar style onto the bass and instead focusing on working hypnotic pockets of gravity deep into the mix.

## MARGARIDA GARCIA & BARRY WEISBLAT LORAN DISCARTSARKET CD

Garcia is a diminutive free-thinking bassist and one of the central cogs in Loran's increasingly voracious New Music scene, while Weisblat is best known for his solo-radar activities with perennialist Tim Barnes and zoned-outch the World Recordings. Weisblat's approach is always extremely hermetic. Live, it's often difficult to

work out what he's actually doing or whether he's even doing anything at all. Here the difficulty lies more in working out who is doing what, as various struts, lonesome codes, digital bursts and assorted domestic electronic activity combine in a subtly vibrating electroacoustic assemblage. At points it sounds as if Garcia is slowly feeding the strings of her bass through a tiny shredding machine while Weisblat boos for his malleable phrase in a vat of quick-setting jelly — and it's this kind of massive sound/event dislocation that makes for a particularly hallucinatory ride.

## GIANNI GEBBIA/LUKAS LIGETI/MASSIMO PUPILLO THE WILLIAMSBURG SONATAS WALLACE CD

Despite the pompous title and the endlessly imitating use of appended track dedications as contextual shorthand (including past references to John Zorn, Dave Arbus and Jean-Michel Basquiat — Ken Vandermark has a lot to answer for), The Williamsburg Sonatas succeeds in transcending these kind of studio appeals to pour form into something that breathes a little more independently. Ligeti's a profound, forceful thinker and his drumming has it up to a clutch of important recordings over the past few years — Tizufi Muro's *Aspirational Healing*, for example. Here he dominates the sound, his locomotive rhythms combining with Pupillo's upright electric bass to cast brown shadows not seen on avant funk walls since the early 80s gave angular event funk 15 minutes in the sunshine. Saxophonist Gebbia is the least interesting player here, moving from pulse, spiritless runs through snappy bass grooves without so much as a hint of unknown tongue.

## FRED VAN HOVE SPRAAK & ROLL WM PRO 200 CD

Pianist Fred Van Hove's early free jazz work with Peter Brötzmann established him as a formidable stylist who drew on a host of improvising outside influences, cutting fierce improvisations with abstract, yodaville shapes and working alacritous shards of melodic logic into the most deft of compositions in a way that flagged up his early classical studies. *Spraak & Roll* is a new two disc set that presents two different aspects of Van Hove's music. The first CD consists of a series of miniatures, with the pianist puzzling his way through a maze of low end growl and working slightly anagram sugar plum patterns into pools of judicious tone. The less committed listener may find it a bit too tittering to fully command their attention. The second disc features two more short pieces as well as the lengthy "Roll-Over", where he plots a more straightforwardly dramatic course through waves of black, bubbling note-forms.

## GRACHAN MONCURI III OCTET EXPLORATION CAPRI CD

Trumpeter and composer Grachan Moncur III into the arms of the avant garde in the late

1960s after a disillusioning spell with Blue Note. He was part of the free jazz diaspora that left America to drown in a deluge of week wrap in 1968, making the trip to France alongside players like Frank Wright, Archie Shepp, The Art Ensemble Of Chicago and Sunny Murray. Moncur spent most of the '70s and '80s working in music education until personal problems sidelined him for most of the 90s. *Exploration* is the first album he has released under his own name in 30 years and it consists of a series of reworkings of some of his heaviest material, from Blue Note-era joints like "Love And Hate" and "Frontierland", through prime BYG compositions like "New Africa" and "Exploration", as well as some spontaneous collective improvisations. Despite a big band that features early associates Andrew Cyrille on drums and Gary Bartz on saxophone, there's little of the fire of the original readings and no one seems prepared to take the music much further than the notes on the paper. Still, nice to have him back.

## THE REVOLUTIONARY ENSEMBLE AND NOW... PM CD

Born in New York's early 70s loft scene, The Revolutionary Ensemble recaptured a clutch of beautiful albums that laid down a blueprint for the creative interaction of strings in a small group context that fused the conventions of chamber music with Southern folk style and other elements of world tradition. Violinist Leroy Jenkins, bassist Sonno and drummer Jerome Cooper focused on the imaginative virtuosity spaces opened up by the interaction of their instruments. In the process they gave rise to a convincingly new primitive/complex model for collective improvisation. The group re-emerged in the early 2000s after a hiatus of more than two decades and if their sound isn't quite as dense as it once was, they have lost little of their sharp tongue. *And Now...* is a studio set from June 2004 and includes Jenkins on harmonica and bells as well as violin, Sonno on bass and Cooper on percussion and keyboard. Jenkins's playing is particularly hypnotic, working high, precisely articulated lines into repeating cantorial areas that recall the sermons of Eastern European klezmer music.

## CECIL TAYLOR TRIO ALL THE NOTES CADENCE CD

Recorded live at Red Men Concert Hall in Minneapolis in 2000, *All The Notes* has the concentrated force of the best of Taylor's work, coupled with the tough, detailed quality of the sound it makes for an ear-appealing listen. This particular trio — Dominic Duval on bass and Jackson Krall on drums — tended to favour working at the kind of sense-shattering speeds that short-circuit any possibility of considered real-time response in favour of more primal reserves of spirit and brains. Duval is on particularly electric form, bracketing Taylor's moxy runs with rubbery ruzzillas and the kind of taut, snappy

shapes that function as launchpads for some of the pianist's more aggressively forced conceptions. The second piece is one of the trio's earliest landmark creations, with Duval's boss generating ghosts of initial misadventure, while Taylor evocatively obscures with huge blocked chords.

## TIGERSMILK FROM THE BOTTLE FAMILY VINEYARD CD

Rob Mazurek's almost complete metamorphosis from out-of-the-pocket bass corner player to one of the most singular margin walkers to come out of Chicago's new music scene has been a highly satisfying process to listen to. On his use of electronics has been particularly estate, at first employing them simply to add colour to his corner/crunch conceptions before allowing them to gradually assume a more central role, resulting in bold works like Silver Spines and *Music For Shattered Light Box And 7 Posers*.

In that sense from The Bottle feels like a bit of a backwards step, a set of tracks scored for cornet, acoustic bass and drum with the addition of live processing by Mazurek's laptop and electronics. Recorded live at Chicago's Empty Bottle (does he live there or something?), the disc has a nice, compact sound, and Mazurek's electronic treatments are fairly subtle — sometimes the messiest blurb — while Jason Roebke's bass and Dylan Van Der Schyff's drums work some low level magic. Although far from being one of Mazurek's most necessary recordings — his Underground Duo and *They have covered similar ground in more evocative style* — *From The Bottle* still functions as an interesting detour.

## TIPPETT/RILEY/GREW/ THOMAS PIANOFORTE SLAND CD

Slantford documents a collaborative 2003 tour from the four pianists Keith Tippett, Stephen Gire, Howard Riley and Pat Thomas, gathering a series of performances all drawn from a show at Sheffield University on 28 October. Grew instigated the tour and he opens the set with a solo piece that matches intimate, weeding lines with a slowly fermenting low end and the occasional pop in the chest. It's like a lecture from the class seat, all brains and fuzzy side-partings.

Grew's duos with his contemporary, Pat Thomas, are more interesting, with Thomas's less laqueous approach forcing Grew into a slightly more considered mode on "Sniffy Lad One", before the two break for some locomotive shadow boxing on "Sniffy Lad Two". Tippett's solo piece is a maudlin rumination for prepared piano that degenerates into a fairly uninteresting drone while Riley's solo piece is the best natured of the bunch, with a swinging bass part that climbs and falls like Buster Keaton. The Tippett/Riley duo closes the set with a piece that falls, easily as you'd expect, somewhere between the two. Not exactly gripping. □

# Modern Composition

Reviewed by Philip Clark

## FRANGHIZ ALI-ZADEH MUGAM SAYAGI

NONET/SHUG CO

Azerbaijani composer Franghiz Ali-Zadeh wrote her first quartet, *Mugam Sayagi*, for The Kirova Quartet in 1993 and has since built a close working relationship with the group. The piece has an intriguing patchwork structure, while the fervour in the melodic writing evokes the flavour of Azerbaijani folk music. Only the introduction of a violin, akin to its drits in misjudged and feeble expedients. Her recent quartet *Ossis* is distinctly more matured, Kirova's *Arcope* space piece is against the sound of dripping water, and *Mansaba* bewails melodic fragments appear as though from the other side of the mirror. *Musica Per Piano* (1999-97) and a piano quartet are more conventional explorations of folklike, but Ali-Zadeh's own idiosyncratic piano playing gives the performances a lift.

## KONRAD BOEHMER POSITION

BNWART CO

Konrad Boehmer arrived in Cologne during the mid-60s, ten years after the golden era of Stockhausen, Kagel and Ligeti, and since 1972 has been resident in Holland where he has offered a hardline modernist alternative to the prevailing house style of Dutch minimalism. *Position* (1990-61) for tape, voices and orchestra belongs to the falsetto from Stockhausen's *Gruppen* and Kagel's *Heterophonie*. Boehmer describes how the tape part can be interpreted with a degree of freedom during the performance, and his orchestral writing is deliciously shrill and oblique, if *Combustiones* (1989) for solo violin, cello and orchestra registers as surprisingly mainstream in comparison, but the most recent piece, *Ombres* for solo piano, is a return to form and fuses enigmatic abstraction with clarity of note choice and form.

## JOHN GAGE ONE/FOUR/TWENTY-NINE

OGRECONICS CD

The OGRECONICS label continues its survey of Cage's Number Pieces with a quirky monaural version of *Twenty-Nine*, all variations of *Four* and *One/4*. The scores are reimagined by Christine Foré (violin/viola), Nance Krummel (cello), Michael Crawford (bass) and Glenn Freeman (percussion), and the musicians aim for a noticeably objective and "once-received" quality to the performance. *Twenty-Nine* moves as though by stealth through its long duration. The scores fuse into a seamless meta-instrument and Freeman's brusque percussion rolls add a tangy second dimension. The six versions of *Four* can be edited by listeners at will into a ten, 20 or 30 minute version; *One/4* is heard through the paucity medium of Freeman's minimalist symbols and groups.

## KUI DONG PANG'S SONG

NEW WORLD CD

From China, Kui Dong is one of many composers with a similar cultural background who aim to marry Western modernism with the traditions of

her homeland, but it's rarely done as well as this. *Earth, Water, Wood, Metal, Fire* (2001) feels like a genuinely important piano piece which manages to jettison the present fast for post-Ligeti *Etude* passages in favour of a fresher melodic palette, intensely translucent and with clear structural goals. If you miss one note, you're all the poorer. Pang's *Song* turns convention upside down at one point by contrasting pulsative fate writing with gentle trills of phrase in the percussion. Crossing (1999-2000) is unashamedly witty and elegant electronic music. Unusually fulfilling.

## MORTON FELDMAN VIOLIN AND ORCHESTRA

CO. LEGION CD

A welcome first recording of Morton Feldman's 1979 *Violin And Orchestra*, performed by Isabelle Faust (violin) and The Bayreuther Rundfunk-Symphonie-Orchestra conducted by Peter Rundt. Even by Feldman's standards this is enigmatic and searching stuff, a work that fundamentally rewrites conventions about how a soloist and orchestra are meant to interact. It is a typically Feldmanesque crymson, the first feature the soloist plays is an atypical flourish, but the composer's indication that the violinist should play muted throughout the piece puts this opening toolbar in an oblique angle to tradition. The orchestra shadows the violin elegiacally, employing the finest of detail all along the orchestral spectrum and creating slight-of-hand illusions with tunings and texture. Flatulent tuba writing and worried woodwinds play up a series of niggling questions. A red-blooded Copic Light — Feldman's often recorded 1985 orchestral piece — is the filler.

## SIMON FELL SFO: FOUR COMPOSITIONS

RED TIGER/SONO CD

This double CD houses the sequels — *Three Quartets* and the *Liverpool Quartet* — to Fell's highly regarded *Thirteen Rectangles*, released on the bassist/composer's own Bruce's Fingers label in 2002. Fell notes that by the time he came to record *Three Quartets*, "It was becoming difficult to realise it within the parameters of the underfunded UK improv/jazz scene." I assume he is referring to the amount of rehearsal time required to pull off such fastidious writing, but the quartet transcends his challenges with *clarity*. The text score of the opening section provokes a clandestine dialogue between slurred unisons and open passages of textural exploration. In contrast the second section, "Heppd By Formalsim", practically subverts through the density of its notation and the abruptness of its jumps. The final movement, "Gruppen Modular 2", is Stockhausen meets George Russell, with Fell's melodic writing orbiting around conventional jazz swing time and more dissonant backgrounds with a spine-like logic of its own. Alex Ward (clarinet), Gail Brand (trumpet), Alex Maguire (piano), Steve Noble (drums) are the quartet; Greg Uweilley (French horn) and Mark Sanders (percussion) join Ward and Fell for the *Liverpool Quartet*.

## CURTIS K HUGHES AVOIDANCE TACTICS

NO LABEL CD

Boston based composer Curtis K Hughes has a background in Western composition and improvisation, and he's an exponent of Bahseisen gamelan music. This disc picks the progress of his chamber compositions written between 1999 and 2001, demonstrating just how quickly a composer can develop in such a short time. His *Suspense Quartet* (1999) is a muddle, with too many ill-devised stylistic strokes straining for superiority. But *Avoidance Tactics* for piano and percussion, written next, is a far more assured exercise in using notation to provoke a spontaneous response from the performers. Hughes references Cecil Taylor in his programme note and the music brings to mind Taylor's work with Tony Daley or Max Roach, all contained within a taut 12 minute span. *Myopie I* (2001) is a spely, dangerous piece for cello, violin and cello, and the disc concludes with an absorbing string quartet that explores material thrust to polar opposites.

## WOLFGANG RIHM CUTS AND DISSOLVES

WARRIOR/ECOLOG CD

Rihm's *Cuts And Dissolves* (1976-77) and *Concerto For Sonore "Over The Line"* (1992) are paired with George Benjamin's *Nicantus* (2002) and Mark Anthony Turnage's *Ends And Begins* (2000-01) on this new disc from Japanese conductor Kazuo Ohno and The Orchestra Symphonie Du La Monnaie. Cuts is a tense score with an unpredictably jittery structure crammed full of suspense and non sequitur shocks. 30 years on and *Concerto* for trombone and orchestra is still expressed to its core, but with a more matured and individualistic orchestral palette, and some conspicuously stretching trombone writing. Benjamin's aphoristic *Nicantus* is full of pitch Turnage displays his ubiquitous skill at slick orchestration, but beyond the surface glitz the sets a lack of emotional or musical depth.

## ALFRED SCHNITKE PIANO QUINTET

BLACK BOX CD

Alfred Schnittke's prolific output is highly variable, but the *Piano Quintet* (1972-76) remains one of his most intractable and stimulating pieces. Written following the death of his mother, the work inhabits an ethereal soundscape of ambiguous allusion and pained nostalgia. The purity of the abstract opening is contaminated by an innocent sounding waltz that's gradually run into the ground by cooing string clusters. The work ends with a mantic looped theme in the piano derived from Beethoven pitched against a lamenting string dirge, opening a dialogue between two worlds. A later *Piano Trio* is a paler version of the quintet, but these are solid performances from an augmented Baroque Piano Trio.

## JOHN SHIRLEY SONIC NINETUSU

CTM CD

John Shirley is based at the University of Massachusetts where he directs the

Contemporary Electronic Ensemble and, despite his academic credentials, sleeve-note annotator Gregory Taylor explains that he "knows a godlike electric guitar noise when he hears it". *Memoriam* (1996) is built on sampled guitar noise and includes the unlikely sound of Chopin's C sharp minor *Impromptu* morphed into thrashy rock guitar noise. The severely tilted *Quintet For Strings And Computer* (1994) is in fact rather playful, neoclassical even, as the interplay between fluid strings and personally plus electronic sounds. *Passage* no. 20... (2001) was originally the soundtrack to a video short that Shirley has whittled down to a ten minute potboiler that plays with jazz licks and clichés. Other works explore pure electronic transformations of acoustic sources.

## MICHAEL TIPPETT SYMPHONIES 2 & 4

NMC 2XCD

Tippett's Fourth Symphony arrived in 1977 and seemed like an astonishing event at the time. Now reissued to celebrate his centenary year, we're left wondering how a 71 year old composer could write such fresh and prophetic music. The tense orchestral opening is overtaken by the sound of human breath on tape, and Tippett describes the piece as "birth to death". Orchestral episodes and shivers proliferate into fully active blocks of activity — strings shake wildly and his characteristically hell-for-leather wind and percussion writing has the sort of phyllophony more normally associated with improvisation music than orchestral formality. The Second Symphony is the composer finding his own personality from within tradition, and a second disc, *Remembering Tippett*, documents intriguing archival material from the 1940s.

## IANNIS XENAKIS ORCHESTRAL WORKS VOL. 4

TWMPV CD

This fourth volume is Tippett's choice of Xenakis's orchestral music contains two premiere recordings — the piano and orchestra *Enkhtion* (1974) and *Knosos* (1991) — paired with Akis (1965) and *Arx* (1987). *Arx* belongs to the era of his (un)influential masterpiece *Zenon* for piano with brass and pursues his exploration of refined wild writing. It is sculpted from weighty blocks of material, apparently aimed at via guitar theory, that move after a month or shorter into napalm metaphors. Xenakis derived the piano and orchestra work *Enkhtion* — meaning *Form Of The Earth* — from graphic sketches reminiscent of densely woven tree branches. The writing is consequently heavily packed with trademark string glissandi and obtrusive windwind lines while highly creative use of percussion highlights key structural landmarks. Pianos, of course, are not built for seamless glissandi and Xenakis solves this difficulty by the sheer bulk of notes the pianist is required to play, an effect that "blasts" a continuum of sound into the physical realm of a wild man and The Luxembourg Philharmonic play with brutal force but also with tremendous sensitivity when required. Akis and *Knosos* are examples of Xenakis's sparser later style. □

# Outer Limits

Reviewed by Jim Haynes

## BEEQUEEN THE BODYSHOP IMPASTO CD

After numerous releases of hustled tones and muffled electroacoustic dissonances, Beequeen made a noticeable debut in 2002 with *Owiness*, an album of post-talk talk song fragments suspended against an inviting wallpaper of waxy ambience. Over the years, the Dutch duo Frans de Waard and Freek Kinkelaar have split their time in numerous projects with considerably different agendas (Freibred, Goem, Shirts, Brunnen, etc.). Despite these multiple allegiances, *The Bodyshop* picks up where the previous Beequeen album left off. An elegant ambience oases between their minimalist songwriting that touches on the wordplay sparseness of Ry Cooder's film scores. The album begins unobtrusively with a riff on "The Dream O' Rumba" that's too close to "Surrender to Heaven" for comfort and a far too precious cover of Nick Drake's "Black Eyed Dog." But when the pair sneaks their songs with pillow caress ambience and set them within nicotine-stained downer jazz, Beequeen's understated scores produce a subtle aftertaste of exquisite melancholia.

## BIRCHVILLE CAT MOTEL CHI VAMPIRES CELEBRATE PSI PHENOMENON CD

With its explosion of chugging Oomooore riffs and juggernaut rhythmic propulsion, the title track from Birchville Cat Motel's *Chi Vampires* will escape inevitable (if justifiable) comparisons to Napier (O) or to the nearly forgotten British nursery rhymes and Spinal Tap. Yet BOM's leap from the holy minimalism of La Monte Young and Charlesworth Palestine into the void of stored heaviness isn't as radical as one might think. New Zealand's Campbell Kneale has always wielded the sound of Birchville Cat Motel with a uniform density of improvised abrasions and raspy electric drones. The first three tracks on *Chi Vampires* steadily glide through compacted layers of sustained church organ tones, amplifier distortion, bowed cymbal dissonance, and surburban luminosity. That basic structure doesn't change one bit when Kneale introduces a full group to accompany her jet engine roar of guitar hepcatness. Birchville Cat Motel can still drone with the best of them; and here they've shown they can rock with the best of them too.

## LAWRENCE ENGLISH TRANSIT CAUD CD

A digital radical bird, *Transit* and abstracts all the sounds found on *Ensemble* from the Australian sound artist Lawrence English. Considering that his source material comes from Robert Rimebold, Ol Olive, Phil Semetz and a whole host of other contributors, English's ability to generalize everything into a cohesive composition is a necessity — lest the album crumble under the strain of disparate field recordings, turntable gestures, guitar scabbings and wireless vocalizations. English seizes all the edges and extends particular timbres into oceanic swells that ebb and flow in

conjunction with the haunted melodies that lumber in the distance, at times resembling the gaping spaces of Thomas Köner and at others the incidental music to Tarantino's *Stalker*. Quiet, unprocessed events of metallic clamour and the chorus of chirpy birds deftly balance the cold, hard polish that English applies to his shadowy, rippling ambience.

## THE HAFER TRIO HOW TO REFORM MANKIND KORM PLASTICS CD

Following the scientific model in which the researcher returns to the same problem set with slight variations to better understand the solutions that come from those equations, the Hafer Trio have often recontextualised previously issued sounds in alternative environments and compositions. Originally released in 1993, *How To Reform Mankind* is the final entry to the "trilogy in three parts" alongside *Kill the King* and *Mastory Of Money*, and picks up on this self-recycling theme. The Hafer Trio's Andrew Molokai leads a dreamy meadow of feedback from *Walk Through The Gates Of Hell* and notably the piano leitmotif that composed the *Negentropy* album. Far from presenting a taxonomic exercise of early successes, McKenna sets up a psychological interplay between sound and memory, in which the signposts from previous works are no longer recognizable. Surrounded by field recordings smeared into an industrial grey, snerp songs and eerie vocal shriekings, *How To Reform Mankind* is ultimately another magnificent, disorienting conundrum.

## ORIGAMI GALAKTIKA LIKE IN CENTRAL EUROPE VENUSUS CD

Origami Galaktika is the work of a Norwegian discographer who refers to himself as BG and also holds from an umbrella organization called Origami Republik. The agendas for all parties are a bit vague, as the Republik may qualify themselves as "an open cultural network with 170-plus agents operating in 38 countries", and this document of Origami Galaktika performing in Slovenia suffers from a similar ambiguity. The spartan sounds of Origami Galaktika seek a general atmosphere of moody introspection and luxuriate in dense applications of reverb, black hole ambience and a spectral disc dislocation shamelessly lifted from *Control*'s *Incense's* *Digilogue* and *In-Vision*. Details sporadically push themselves forward from behind the heavy curtain of low-end rumblings and somnolent, loopings with occasional success. Out-cached reverb and distant screams nupture the contemplation tranquility. But the use of tribal drums, heavily drenched with flutes and minge-like reverb cheaply obscures an unspecified and unneeded quasi-mysticism to the music.

## DANIEL MENCHE DRUNK GODS LAPULU CD

Following last year's *Francesco López CD*, *Drunk Gods* is the second release on the promising Lapulu label. A single, restless and endlessly

stirring 20 minute piece, there's a crazed energy to it right away, as it launches off with a lip-salad rhythmic bass that and squawking tone lines. It gradually accretes damaged layers of electronic sound, each seeming to push the piece into a more unstable musical space. As it proceeds, with progressive microtonal tightening of the garble, the atmosphere is dominated by a queasiness that is both aurally captivating and slightly nauseating — pitches heaving around uncomfortably like the deck of a ship on a rolling swell. All told, it's a strangely claustrophobic experience, but the uneasiness is always stimulating. (Will Montgomery)

## DAVE PHILLIPS III GROUND FLAT CD

Up to half of Dave Phillips' *III* is silent or at least inaudible. Yet these silences are anything but empty or contemplative spaces. Phillips presents 99 tracks which bleed into an aggregate collage of violent noise punctures set against a static ambient background. Having founded *Feed Of God*, halted as Switzerland's answer to Napalm Death in the late 80s and later joining the transgressive act *Schlimpfen-Gruppe*, Phillips has built his artistic career out of naked antagonism. Much of *III* sounds like a construction site gone awry, as Phillips grumbles screeching noise vocalizers alongside violent sharp thuds from hammers and nail guns. More arpeggiated noise blends of Merzbow digital noise occur in condensed bursts, but Phillips never allows for a cathartic release of his noise. Rather, *III* reflects an unswerving nihilism, presenting these malignant sounds within a context of clinical deadness.

## DARREN TATE PAUL BRADLEY SOMETIME TODAY PUNKY PUNK CD

Sometime Today begins with a tiny scoping of objects coupled with a subtle tone melody that recalls later Martin Feldman compositions like *For Samuel Beckett* and even the ancient Bernhard Glaser homages to Feldman. For staid tone scientist Owen Tate of Ora and Menos, here working with Paul Bradley, these references merely introduce a revealing kaleidoscope of timbral intervening. Gradually, Tate and Bradley's soundfield expands through a web of undulating snarewave feedback tones; in turn, these pure sounds steadily give way to the sustained marines from a long stringed instrument and bowed metal. Throughout the album, field recordings echo in cathedral reverb and a chorus of looping drones resonates in harmony with the acoustic sounds. Sometime Today is among the best work by either artist.

## TEENAGE PANZERKORPS NATIONS ARE INSANE PINK SKULLS CD-R

Poastling his orphan investigations into pastoral improvisation through the Jewelled Antler projects of Thugs, Blithe Sons and The hytes, Glenn Oatfield also runs the Pink

Skulls label for considerably noisier art rock. Nations Are Insane is the second Pink Skulls release for Teenage Panzerkorps, a melody collection of grizzled pieces that includes two Jewelled Antler regulars Jason Hovea and Oatfield returning to their California headwinds. But Teenage Panzerkorps is dominated by an imposing German giant by the name of Bunker Welt, whose megaphone vocals bark atropop slogans alongside driving punk rereads of three-chord progressions, all bused in a morose of overblown four-track tape hiss.

## TROUM AUTOPOIESIS SMALL VOICES LP

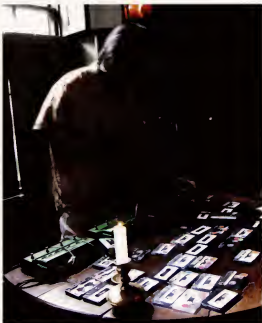
In 2003, the German post-industrial duo Troum completed their celebrated *Takuma* trilogy. Each of the three records concentrated on the aesthetic fundamentals of their work: harmonies, drones, and rhythms. At the same time, the trilogy was inscribed with the metaphysical themes related to Abolitionist dreamtime. If this mighty body of work had one flaw, it was the way the formalist agenda of this series buried Troum's ongoing investigations into hypnagogic states and the psychological impact of sound. Troum have been at their best when the sonic elements of their work play off each other and run in parallel with their conceptual ideas. The vinyl-only picture disc *Autoptosis* finds Troum at the top of their game, as their guitars and bass, heavily fortified with effects, drift through miasmic washes. When suspending their drones as labyrinthous seas of sound, Troum emerge as a brooding deglacier of the sheegeeer ethos. And throughout *Autoptosis*, they valiantly steer their own chugging riffs and idiosyncratic melodies.

## VERTONEN RETURN OF THE INTERBANG CIP CD

*Return Of The Interbang* features three distinct and tenuously related compositions from the Chicago seer provocateur Blake Edwards aka Vertonen. The opener "Isotonic Circulation 1 & 2" transitions complex layers of negating tonalities along a very thin line separating harmony and dissonance. Edwards compounds these psychoacoustic pressures with low and sicktones and a hypnotic Trance, giving a considerable depth to his black ambience. The second track doesn't fare so well, as its unwavering, breathless presents a common post-industrial tract of acoustical self-control mechanisms. However, these pulsations emerge as imperfect simulations rather than abstracted artifacts, making any questions about the rationale for sequencing SPK or TG moot from the onset. Edwards's shift from the squawk bass noise "n" beep composition to the serpentine turntable loops of the album's final suite is a marked improvement, with its core dissonance of unidentified 60s exotica records into tactile flutterings. □

# Print Run

New music books: devoured, dissected, dissed



Cassette heaven! Ak Onda in performance

## IMPROVISED MUSIC FROM JAPAN 2004 YOSHIYUKI SUZUKI (EDITOR) IMPROVISED MUSIC FROM JAPAN PSK + 2XCD \$15.99

BY CLIVE BELL

One obvious reason why the IMJ series of books + CDs is such an interesting read is the vibrancy of the small Japanese improvisation scene. Behind the internationally recognised figures of Otomo Yoshihide, Sachiko M. Toshimaru Nakamura and Ami Yoshida stretches a wonderfully diverse gaggle of experimenters, helixing on challenging attitudes to music from the ground up, yet somehow modest and thoughtful with it.

IMJ's first book was a broad overview, while 2003's *IMJ Extra* issue posed into the stonemason of CD-R labels, glitch-ambient, turntable abuse and barbers emanating from a younger generation. Now IMJ's third edition is surprisingly chatty. Five interviews with cassette-jockey Aki Onoda (by The Wire's Ed Baxter), female shamisen maestro Yumiko Tanaka, sax maverick Masahiko Okura, superlucid guitarist Taku Sugimoto, Altered States guitarist Uchihaishi

Kanaiha, Tokyo resident and Skat member Sam Bennett, and sire-wrangler Sachiko M. IMJ interviews tend to be intimate affairs, often conducted in the musician's home. In addition to the modesty mentioned above, they often penetrate straight to the musician's deep convictions with impressive intellectual honesty. Not so much soul-baring, just that some personal and concise thought sheds light on these often extreme soundworks. We see the music through their eyes: "To me the music isn't minimal at all — now I can feel that there's a lot of really concentrated stuff there!" says Sachiko M. Of her laserbeam-style sinewave manipulation, "I want to avoid special playing techniques as much as possible. I want to play in a normal way," says Masahiko Okura, whose solo sax contribution to the accompanying set of CDs is gobsmackingly radical.

Another remarkable saxophonist is Kang Tae Hwan from Korea. His beautiful solo on the CD is pulsing psalm, radiating Buddhist calm, as if from a parallel world to Evan Parker. Kang's uncle was executed by the Korean government as a communist sympathiser, and Kang was denied a passport for many years. Otomo, an

admirer of Kang and Korean percussionist Park Je Chun, here goes to some trouble to document a trip he made to Seoul. Japanese and Korean improvisers played alongside each other, and Otomo interviewed several musicians including Kang. Relations between Korea and Japan are far from straightforward. Indeed, it sometimes seems as if the musicians are on distant wavelengths but characteristically Otomo enjoys the instability.

Otomo and Taku Sugimoto are both musicians who constantly question their own concepts — fear of being stuck in a rut seems to motivate them almost as much as anything else. Otomo's account of his and Keith Rowe's joint squalling of the LMC's 2003 festival is honest, clear-sighted and ultimately moving. Yoshio Otaeri's interview with Sugimoto shows examples of the guitarist's recent compositions, and Sugimoto is explicit about his use of composition as a means to escape what he sees as the gravitational pull of improvisation.

Elsewhere Tetsu Saitoh and French saxophonist Michel Doneda write about touring Canada, Europe and Japan. Also along for the ride were koto player Kazuo Sawai and guitarist

Kazuo Imai, both interviewed in the volume. Imai is a quiet but fascinating figure: pioneering hoo guitarist Masayuki Takayanagi hired him as vocalist for his 1970s New Directions group, while he also played with Tetsuhiro Kosugi's Taj Mahal Travellers. In Tokyo's Off Site venue in 2003 I found him squatting on the floor amidst toys and tiny instruments, delicately contributing to a quartet of improvisers half his age.

Ex-After Dinner singer Roco writes about her View Masters project, an Osaka based "sound collection and observation agency/club" increasingly interested in environmental recording. Ami Yoshida biases her tour diary around winning the Ars Electronica prize in Austria and Tetsuhiro Nakamura interviews His old sparring partner, guitarist Tetsu Akiyama. Akiyama's ancestors were samurai, and his parents kept swords in the family house. In a passage somehow typical of the magazine, Akiyama describes how he took a sword to his electric guitar: "A sword is a weapon and a work of art, and also has something to do with history. Also, the sound doesn't stop at the moment of switching from pull to push, which I find it does with a violin bow." □

## CAN'T STOP WON'T STOP: A HISTORY OF THE HIPHOP GENERATION

JEFF CHANG  
ST MARTIN'S PRESS HSK R14.99  
BY DAVID TOMPKINS

Kool Herc died his first party in the wake of a cloudburst in 1974. He believes rain is good luck. He's cruising through a Bronx drizzle in a topless sedan, a toothpick casually aimed at the stereo as he notes the reincarnated storefronts. Filming shotgun are the BBC for the 1984 BBC HipHop documentary *Beat 7ms*. They already shot Herc showing home movies of his parties, Herc flying kites, Herc chauffeuring speaker towns, lounging in his back seat like important dignitaries, bringing in rise to beat radio.

Come 2002 and now Jeff Chang, author of *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History Of The HipHop Generation*, is division in Herc's tale, intending a tape of him doing some pre-electronic function at Patterson Housing which they just passed. As

they arrive at the Rocksteady Reunion on a West Side pier, MTV threatens not to air if the crowd doesn't knock it off with the bad flipping. In the shadow of a giant inflatable Lipton can, Prince Be from PM Down sits in a booth selling T-shirts. "I made a gold record and all I have to show for it is this crappy shirt."

Chang and Herc walk in looking optimistic, Chang in particular, having already logged a HipHop day. With his story of Herc's story, you can have a HipHop day by mooching off someone else's HipHop day, the enveloping of memory always returning to the same point: "I love this shit."

Herc pines the intro to the book, while Chang traces the DJ's Kingston childhood and arrival in the Bronx, November of 1967, en route to starting his party, one for the trouble, and nearly getting stabbed to death for it. Can't Stop Won't Stop about how hip-hop went through hell to get here, to get those 22 inch tires. It's about the foot soldiers and footnotes. It's about HipHop as a fact in the era. HipHop, a

vehicle for social and political change — Can't Stop gives those words an speaking terms again, reminding them and us what they once meant to each other while pushing them out of the building and into tomorrow. Nostalgia can be a fine hazard.

Researched down to the nub, the book checks Old School myth through the eyes — and fists — of those who lived it. Believable gang alliances, betrayals, tragedies, ambulance happenings and precinct assaults are all mapped out with a cartographer's wide-angled eye and an aerosol bomber's heart. From graffiti king to The Wu to Queens Brother President Carlos Suarez, Chang tracked down the survivors and they in turn enriched him with their truths. The story of Afrika Bambaataa, his transformation from Black Spade Warrior to Zulu Nation Godfather, the loss of his dear friend Sadeiki, and Bam's attempt to transcend the bloody grid, is the most, if not only, revealing piece. "Planet Rock" look at his musical life that there's ever been.

In the chapter "Zelus On A Time Bomb: HipHop Meets The Rockers Downtown" (a love for reggae is worn on the author's sleeve), you're thrown into that fabled 1982 culture clash, whether it be a woman trying to do sign language to a Rammstein freestyle at a Pete Seeger show or the unpredictable heyday of the Bay in New York. Some of the most poignant accounts come from the B-Boys, HipHop's most feted, splintered and then sadly forsaken common denominator.

By the mid-80s, the Old School is in recession and crack takes ascendance. Graffiti gets snuffed, cops get murderous, Public Enemy get years (and sadly theirs) and Chang gets into it with Ice Cube and L.A. Korean community. The City of Quartz explodes, just as HipHop's first magazine *The Source* finds its voice, only to lose it in an editorial war. As the *Magazine of Hip Hop Music, Culture & Politics*, *The Source* should give this book a five mic review for telling its own corrupt story more truthfully than it ever could — though that would be bad business. □

## SPACEMEN 3 AND THE BIRTH OF SPIRITUALIZED

ERIK MORSE  
CAMBRIDGE PRESS RPK R14.95  
BY DAVID KENNAN

Spacemen 3's posthumous canonization is yet another mazzily unlikely, it satisfyingly righteous twist in one of the most fucked up marginal sagas to grace British rock in the last three decades. As Erik Morse's obsessively researched biography makes plain — despite his valiant attempts to locate them somewhere upwind of contemporaries like My Bloody Valentine — for most of their short, explosive career, Spacemen 3 existed in a comparative music and cultural void. They made do with bizarre gigs alongside way distant cousins like Psychic TV, Fields Of The Nephilim and The Jazz Butcher and articulating the common ground between folk and blues, ferocious free jazz and

the liberation theology of vanguard psychedelic operatives like The 13th Floor Elevators and The MC5. Meanwhile, the rest of the country gazed at the traction from football fans in soccer parks playing dirt new wave to football fans in shabby playing dirt dance music.

Morse's writing style immediately flags up exactly where he's coming from. When he breaks from a straight recounting of the facts, he favors the kind of breathless, theoretical raptures of the mid 80s Melody Maker crowd and he carries the same kind of historically truncated set of referents. In precise, this often means that he's unable to fully trace the various tracks back to their sources, a real problem with a group of plagiarists as creatively voracious as Spacemen 3.

So we get weedy exegesis on quaint critical touristeries like Air Kane in place of sourcing "Big City" in the Missing Scientists' "Big City.

Bright Lights" and hilariously ill-informed pronouncements on "the strange network of Enslavement, Neubauten and the Wedding Present", which has to be the first time those two groups have ever been conceptually linked. Throughout the book Morse formulates the narrative with some gaudy philosophical riffs based around the historical resonance of the group's Dreamweapon concept, with sentences that end in "quoth Deleuze" and run to "for drowning is like schizophrenia: a process and not a goal."

But skip the intro and the intervening episodes and this is a classic rock read with an unbelievably dysfunctional cast. Sonic Boom comes out of it all best and worst. Through his actions and the eyes of virtually all of his collaborators he appears as a humorless megamanager, but because he is Morse's most accommodated interviewee he inevitably gets

cut the most slack or has the last word. Jason Pierce doesn't appear to have had quite as much involvement in the project, and that certainly contributes to his coming out of it as the least colorful character in the tale. Despite the creative chemistry between himself and Boon — a magic that neither of them have been able to recapture in any of their work since — they seemed profoundly incompatible. There is a sheikah of drugs, a bar on women in the tour van, a bassist and drummer treated with the contempt of session hacks, some of the most profoundly elemental rock shows of the 80s and you have all the ingredients for a bitter, head-butt — and enormously entertaining — OD catastrophe. Thank it is as Hammer Of The Gods rescored for white trash and middle England record collectors and you'll be close to grasping the essential pleasure of this great rollercoaster of a tale. □

## THE QUEER COMPOSITION OF AMERICA'S SOUND: GAY MODERNISTS, AMERICAN MUSIC AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

NADINE HUBBS  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS HSK \$29.95  
BY JOHN GILL

I really wanted to like this book — a feminist reading of 20th century gay male music. I got into trouble as soon as I started wading into her turgid academicism, the sort of text you suspect is aimed at the folks who do cat tenure in US universities — Ms Hubbs is associate professor of music and women's studies at the University of Ann Arbor, Michigan. Then the serious crap started turning up.

Most homosexuals born after the Second World War will find her concentration on a coterie of closeted white early 20th century US composers baffling, puzzled and possibly even racist. Worse still, however, is her subscription to the "paleodisc" model of queer sex, which probably died out with the last person who dated Oscar Wilde, and the semantics of just what Aaron Copland, Leonard Bernstein, Ned Rorem and that New York fagocracy actually contributed to the construction of (North, while we're at it, Professor) American identity.

With the possible exceptions of decent-hearted composer Marc Blitzstein and ghostly self-publicist Rorem, these men were all closet cases. Maybe their pals knew they were frats, but they went out of their way to keep that

quiet. The only individual who comes out of this sordid history of deception with any dignity whatsoever is Henry Cowell, who was sent to the chain gang for being queer. Even John Cage, a personal idol, went to his grave a closet queen.

It also has to be asked just how these sad fancies really helped construct a notion of (North, Nadine...) America, given that virtually all of them were enamored of French neoclassicists such as Satie and Boulianger. Could any of them compare to the (North) America conjured by the sublime Charles Ives, or come to that, Ellington, the Ottetto Coleman of Saxes O'America or James Brown? Umm and his totally mental *Are You Glad To Be In America?* Post-punk Homocore/cut theory would allow us to kidnap

these people as honorary queens, and here's a sick confession: Steve Niro is top of my list of potential abductees... and what Niro's work says about (North) America leaves Hubbs' coterie idling in the driveway, whistling, almost literally. Dumb.

This book may well secure her tenure, but it is a middle-handed misreading of third-rate music that is almost totally irrelevant to anyone aware of the century and its true innovations. There, for example, are the perhaps not so famous lesbian composers such as Pauline Oliveros or Ruth Steinberg? Were David Del Tredici or Bob Ostertag? Nice book proposal; pity it waltzed the author into the arms of the outdated (North) American academic establishment. □

# Cross Platform

**Sound in other media. This month: Julian Cowley is granted a peek into the wonderful and frightening world of Hugh Metcalfe, poet, film maker, 'dubious' instrumentalist and tireless Improv activist**



Side from Hugh Metcalfe's adventures on celluloid

"I like bits and bobs, really," says Hugh Metcalfe, explaining his approach to making films as we walk the streets of North London's Finsbury Park in the pouring rain. Metcalfe – film maker, performance artist, poet and self-declared dubious musician – is widely known as host of the Klinker, for 23 years London's most reliably unpredictable performance event. He carries a Super8 camera, pausing frequently to shoot snippets of fruit and veg shops, traffic, posters, passers-by and their umbrellas. "I usually take two or three frames at a time. The eye can see 16 images a second, so you'll definitely see that banana. I just do blind filming. Anything intellectual comes out shit so I go for primary colours and try to get it in focus as much of the time as possible. Bob's your uncle."

When I first met Metcalfe in the late 1970s he was playing with a Tony Oxley group and in a trio named Levers that recorded an LP for the Bead label. Since then his smashed-up guitar, violin, drums and amplified gasmask have appeared in many contexts. Recently he has toured as Metcalfe's Microtinal Megastars with saxophonist Mick Beck, bassist Alan Durant and dramatic declaimer Sir Gideon Venn. As Leeds Metcalfe he features in The Cross-Dressed Quartet, a "violin and vestments" collaboration with violinists Dylan Bates, Sylvia Halliatt and Sue Ferrar.

His 'special' group, though, was BirdYak with sound poet Bob Cobbing, joined on occasion by dancer Jennifer Pike and saxophonist Lol Coxhill. Metcalfe felt close personal affinity with Cobbing, who led an improvised life on his own terms. When he died in 2002 aged 82, BirdYak were scheduled to perform in Barcelona. "Bob said all along he wouldn't be able to do it, but he wanted me to go," Metcalfe recalls. "I did it on my own with a video of BirdYak filmed by Mary Morrison at the Wenlock Arms pub in Islington. She got

the whole gig, but also filmed people in the pub and their reactions. It's fantastic. The Spanish performance was so emotional – I've never done anything so painful in my life. I cried, but it was brilliant."

Metcalfe performs his own poetry in the guise of Carpet Sniffer. "I gave up smoking and I took up writing. First thing in the morning I'd write, 'Poodle pervert carpet sniffer'. That's the first line of a poem." He writes four-word texts to be sung in permutations with Fuck Off Batman, a duo with drummer Jim Le Balguy and bassist Darren Morris, otherwise keyboard player for pop singer Gabrielle. In contrast with that textual concision, Metcalfe has completed a 140 page poem called "Blow By Blow", written without repetition. "One word after the other – no sense at all," he explains. "In the end I did repeat words but by joining them together I got round that. Some of the words did end up being very long. I think the last three pages is just one word." Cobbing issued excerpts under his New River Project imprint; Metcalfe hopes to publish the entire poem.

He's made films since 1978 and during the past ten years has often accompanied them as a duo with pianist Varyan Weston. They played initially as The Beshitlers but their name has since changed. "We're called Skip after a film I made in 1984 of a skip being filled up. Varyan has a quirky sense of humour and watches the films very intently." This year the duo have played in Berlin, the Czech Republic and Hungary. In another venture Metcalfe and Casio manipulator James Holcombe have paired up as Bicycle Clip Six to provide musical accompaniment for their own Super8 work. "James got into film making and develops the films himself. He suggested that we did film workshops at the Klinker, knowing I'd already done events where everyone paints pictures, Kiddle Klinker with kids painting and baking bread, and a wine

making Klinker in Bristol. For the latest workshop we had 18 people. James has bought lots of secondhand cameras. We supply film and go out around Hackney. Next day the films are developed in a kitchen, adjacent to the back room of the Sussex pub where the Klinker takes place. The films dry out on clothes racks, are wound onto spools and then I edit them with everyone watching. In the evening we all see the films for the first time."

Metcalfe favours a documentary approach in his own work. "In 1997 I grew a beard – shaped it, bleached it, dyed it and did an eight month filming of the changes in colour and shape. The film itself lasts about ten minutes. During the same period I made a wine making film. You see me sucking the wine through. There's this bearded man and a bottle's filling up. The label says Mangoes Toilet No 2 Sweet. You've got the sun shining behind and corks going off – a favourite film. I showed it at a Swedish girls' school last March, during a tour with instrument maker Johannes Bergmark. They thought it was great."

That Scandinavian tour ended in a town called Lund. "I had six hours to spare so I made a film of the streets – The Streets Of Lund. I developed a system for turning around and shooting at junctions, walked the whole perimeter of the place and ended up at the point I started from. Back in London I got out the A-Z street map and found Lund Point, a high rise flat at Stratford. I filmed that – it's got a very weird shape. I looked at an atlas of Britain and found two places called Lund in Yorkshire. Trumpeter Paul Sheersmith drove me there to film those villages. A lot of trouble to go to just to do a Streets Of Lund film." □ Klinker events are held at The Sussex Pub in North London every Tuesday and Friday and also at the Ivy House Pub, Nunhead, South London every Thursday. [www.klinkerclub.info](http://www.klinkerclub.info)



Left: Notische Refuse. Centre: Alex Hacke aka Boris (above) and Einzigende Neubaute. Right: Thijs (wagging in Dundee)

## BERLIN SUPER 80: MUSIC & SUPER 8 UNDERGROUND WEST BERLIN 1978-1984

MONITORPOP DVD + CD + BOOK  
BY BIBA KOPF

Created out of the Cold War's contradictions, the walled-in city of West Berlin existed between 1961-89 as an oasis of rampant consumerism (and even deep into the communist German Democratic Republic. After the GDR erected the Wall to stop its haemorrhaging workforce from defecting, the Bundesrepublik responded by keeping West Berlin alive with a constant drip of subsidies, grants and incentives to project it as a glittering showcase of capitalist freedom. "The Wall turned West Berlin into an island, enabling the evolution of a peculiar, idiosyncratic subculture," says film maker Ralf S. Waltherstein, in the book comprising the CD + DVD set, Berlin Super 80.

The package is an extraordinary document of the work spooling out of the backyards and squats in the former 'worker barracks' of the city's rundown Kreuzberg district between 1978-84. The 12 minute Fragment Video, by the action painting/film/music collective Notische Refuse, provides a vivid if messy snapshot of the zeitgeist, splicing footage of night time Wall graffiti raids, the group live, an analogue computer interface, and a street battle between riot cops, locals and the masked anarchist Autonomen, to a sauced slither soundtrack.

Like most artists on Berlin Super 80, Notische Refuse came of age with punk but took many of their aesthetic cues from New York No Wave. The largely self-shot film makers featured here fell on the almost obsolete medium of Super-8 film, buying up cheap cameras in junk shops. Explaining the medium's immediacy, many edited their films in-camera, using their own or their colleagues' bodies and habitats as subjects. With scarce resources, they instantly conjured flickering stop-action rhythms by keeping their fingers on

the camera trigger, while making much of Super-8's unstable, easily damaged surfaces. The scratched textures and savage jumpcuts of Homel & Buhler's 1982 clip for Malena's "Geld" might be nightmare viewing for anyone prone to epilepsy, but it's a perfect fit for the group's darkly acerbic update of Cabaret's "Money Makes The World Go Around". By contrast Die Tödliche Dosis as ever buck expectations that German/Berlin art should be heavy, angst-ridden, etc, with a kitsch, out of sync comic short setting a wobbly filmed tea party in a friend's kitchen to their own magnificent song "The Guilt Structure". Both Doris and Malalai feature alongside Notische Refuse and Einzigende Neubaute (fronted by Bika Bangali at his most evocative) and others in Such Was The SD 36, a fragmented portrait of Kreuzberg's noxious punk venue. Including the Turkish owners' bemused response to Neubaute's attempt to bring the roof down offers a rare glimpse from outside the scene. Other glimpses of Berlin beyond Kreuzberg come in Christoph Döring's excellent *Bei Driver* remake, 3:02, and notorious Mekromantik director Jörg Buttgerer's affecting fictional biopic of his father

The CD is less revelatory but nonetheless contains a representative selection of often surprisingly playful Berlin music, when it's not deliberately and irreversibly scored by the early drum machines and synthesizers deployed to seal the city's defining tone of alienation. But get it for its soundtrack tracks: Mona Muir's "My Lu" and Alex Hacke aka Boris's waltz elegy for "Hiroshima" before its destruction.

Meanwhile the GDR only gets one look in, via Walter Gommers's Hammer And Sickle scratch 'n' flicker-flicker burlesque, in which he cheekily does things with communism's iconic tools that would make Mao see red, over a soundtrack of socialist balladist Ernst Busch's voice being injected through a tapehead at various speeds. Well, really these people should be thanking the GDR — without whom none of this, etc, etc — for

the wallpaper upon which Berliners once showed such amazing efforts.

## KILL YOUR TIMID NOTION DUNDEE DCA

UK

BY BRIAN MORTON

Until about 9:30 on the Saturday evening, it might have been called *Soothe Your Savage Beast*. Compared to last year's inaugural psych-out with Acid Mothers Temple and the recent, surprise-laden *Instal.O4* festival at the Arches in Glasgow, curator Barry Eason's second sound and image programme at Dundee's DCA started off with unexpected mildness. The current of free folk experimentation, begun last year with *Sustained Hand Of The Man*, was sustained on the opening night by Brighton-based Thijs, who commands an altogether quieter but by no means restful palette. In the darkened main space and playing in the round, they conjure up a Hansel and Gretel world of mysterious noises and scampings that might convey rescue or equally possibly an unpeppable danger.

Following the Christoph Heumann and Andrew Chalk duo Nimro's drone-based performance and a typically concentrated and nowadays quiet by-the-decree appearance by veterans AMM, it offered a first sign that this was not a programme dominated by gallery prettiness. It was, however, a programme very largely dominated by moving images. The accompanying projections —

Malcolm Le Grice with AMM, Bill Morrison with Nimro, Keith Evans with Thugs — turned out to be less compelling than the richly eclectic programme of film that complements KTN's audio-visual thrust and DCA's now familiar role as Scotland's most ambitious exhibition space. Kenneth Anger was as Kenneth Anger most any time, perverse, wondrously beautiful, cussedly ugly by turns. By the same token, a sequence of films by and about Charlemagne Palestine beguiled and irritated. His own *Ritual Dans Le Vide 2/3* and

*I'm Tying Myself Up To Keep Myself From Falling Apart* took care of the latter, but Pip Chodros's brilliant 2002 film of Palestine playing in a Paris art gallery was superb: 69/23 frames of Super-8 synchronized to 69/45 notes of music, speed of frame succession controlled by speed of playing, other aspects of the performance replicated in the visual cortex by chromatic manipulations, screen masking, flicker and positive/negative effects. Beautiful and strange.

Film maker Jürgen Reble's 1991 footage of Chicago from the front car of an elevated train has been processed to look like Fritz Lang's German silent movie classic, *Metropolis*. Thomas Riner played the dusty film stock through an optical sound system and constructed a completely appropriate soundtrack from the resultant cackle. Also experimenting with deteriorating celluloid, Bill Morrison's *Light Is Calling*, soundtrack by Bang On A Can founder Michael Gordon, uses a sequence from James Young's 1926 *The Belk*, an elusive snippet of narrative robbed of its linear logic by being looped back on itself to give the impression that every meaningful moment was both anticipated and echoed, visually and aurally. A sepe masterpiece.

Even more impressive was the work of two Austrians, both also working from found footage. Martin Arnold's *Passage À L'acte* takes a snippet of domestic non-drama — a father admonishing his son to sit down at table before dashing off to school — and turns it into a hammering mimetic poem, fraught with threat and buried antagonism. A frame drop slapping back, a spoon in a plate, assorted snippets of dialogue become percussive beats in a virtuosic manipulation of raw action that is most musical and intensely cinematic, and thus a key illustration of what KTN is about. As is Peter Tschickelries's dazzling ten minute *Outer Space*, which begins as generic horror and ends as a violent subversion of and by film itself. Through a muffled soundtrack that steadily gains in intensity, actress Barbara



Left: Jan Werner in the *Looking For A Thrill* DVD. Right: Sue Ra



Hershey is seen in what looks like a formulaic suspense situation. It becomes clear, though, that the threat she viciously reacts against, destroying her surroundings, is not just the seeing camera but the controlling frame of collared and screen glass. It's a (literally) shattering experience.

Musically, it all took off on Saturday night when Text Of Light — Lee Ranaldo, Ulrich Krieger, Tim Barnes and Alan Licht — gave a dark and numbing performance that brought a more incoherent spirit out of the DCA walls. They followed a capitated Perkin, who'd lost a member to Berlin air traffic control and sounded underpowered as a result. The closer to Perkin I got, the more I seemed to be going. Getting close to Tower Recordings, the free folk collective inspired by Matt Valentine, was more a matter of getting into the spirit of a gag that managed to combine hootenanny and psychedelic camp meeting. In a weekend dominated by guitars and percussion — Uli Krieger's saxophone was the only horn I saw or heard — these were the most straightforwardly melodic and rhythmic, long loops of abstract song punctuated by whoops, tempo changes that wouldn't have disgraced The Philip Glass Ensemble and unexpectedly jazzy looseness of structure that pointed to roots as diverse as Tim Buckley, John Fahey and The Incredible String Band. A brilliantly balanced and daringly understated programme, a genuinely immersive experience; hopefully a major slot in Scotland's consolidating arts calendar.

## LOOKING FOR A THRILL: AN ANTHOLOGY OF INSPIRATION

THRILL JOCKEY DVD

BY MARC MASTERS

In 2002, approaching the tenth anniversary of her Thrill Jockey label, Bettine Richards asked

musicians, writers, film makers and fans to describe "a musical moment that inspired them". She enlisted director Braden King and editor Ian Williams (entirely guitarist for Dan Caballero and Battles) to shoot and piece together these stories. The result is a bulky DVD of 112 interviews totalling five and a half hours. It might not be uniformly interesting, but *Looking For A Thrill* contains a wealth of absorbing anecdotes.

As King admits in the notes (and I can blatantly attest), watching all the interviews is a daunting task. Wisely, the DVD offers direct access to each clip and to groups collected by instrument and subject matter. King and Williams shot only subjects and backgrounds, requiring jurors to delete pauses and stumbles. "We knew that there would be no way to hide our edits," says King. "[So] if they weren't to be avoided, they were to be amplified." Thus jarring effects such as fish frames, time glitches and bursts of noise dot most of the interviews. Williams greatly varies these techniques, but few rise above gimmickry and the breaks might have been better handled as unreflected jumpcuts.

King and Williams also drench the footage in special effects. Some work well, such as Rene Burgy's Bob Barrister slowly fading in and out of his chair while talking about jazz; but most are unrelated to the interviews and merely reminders of the film makers' presence. The expressions of the Jesus Lizard's David Yow during his enthused discussion of Led Zepplin are removed in favour of an empty car seat, while Nobuko Takekuma's wince during his subtitled tale of a Bopovsky exhibition is replaced by other interviews, implying that anyone who doesn't understand Japanese couldn't possibly care to hear what Takekuma sounds like.

But when it comes to the most important

aspect of editing — choosing what to keep and what to leave out — King and Williams succeed. Some clips are predictable, as subjects resort to generalities about punk rock, but many relate unexpected tales. Giant Sand's Howe Gelb describes the music of a pinball machine ("It was like [being] vaccinated with a Victoria needle!"); Sorender's Eye explains how an album of test tones influenced him; film maker Jon Cohen reveals the magic of a brazen edit on Neil Young's *Harvest*; and Mouse On Mars' Jan St Werner morphs a discussion of guitar solos into a meditation on abstract sound.

Surprisingly, only a few subjects treat the exercise as a performance: Tortoise's John McEntire hides behind a distorted mic, while King Clay's Gene Booth delivers a druggy *Catfish* Dead tale like a stand-up comic. Throughout, King and his cinematographers create interesting compositions from just a single person and a background. The Butchies' Kara Wilson sits against a pixelated skyline that looks like an awful photocopy, while Boredoms' Yoshimi's story of a Bacio Pygmy record is enhanced by her shadowy setting and Chris Browke fades into a murky hallway.

Generally, the more experienced subjects are the best storytellers, their tales textured from years of reflection. 100 Flowers' Kigel Johansen describes how the invisible force of Royce Erickson guided his group's signature song; Harriet Dwyer learns restraint from Dan Chery; and Arletta's Tara Key shows us photos of a group from her youth that she still caresses today. During two of the best interviews, with bass player Mike Watt and Sonic Youth guitarist Thurston Moore, King and Williams wisely get out of the way, refraining from frequent edits or effects. Moore's tale of driving spontaneously to

Mex's Kansas City as a teenager and getting blindsided by Suicide is riveting, while Watt's rambling route from worshipping Richard Hell to getting to play his kodi's bass is truly inspiring.

The best part of *Looking For A Thrill* is its mood-riding quality. No two viewers will find the same segments interesting, and the appeal of each varies: for some it's the story; for others it's the telling, or both. My favourite comes from Town And Country's Jim Doring, the DVD's sole cowering voice: "I'm not inspired by all the records I own," he laughs, "I'm intimidated by them."

## SUN RA/PHIL NIBLOCK THE MAGIC SUN

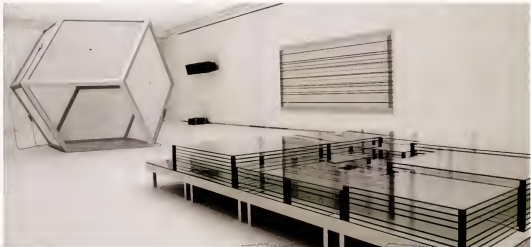
ARMISTIC DVD

BY MARC MASTERS

The 2003 release of *The Movement Of People Making* — a DVD of Phil Niblock's 1970s films — was an overwhelming event. It contained more than three hours of media, including six movies and nine pieces of his imposing minimalist music. Niblock's *Magic Sun* DVD is much smaller in scale — a single 17 minute Niblock film of The Sun Ra Arkestra, along with a short track of spoken Ra audio set to stills from the film — yet even more exciting. Perhaps Niblock's best known motion picture (albeit mostly through word of mouth, as it has rarely been screened outside of Sun Ra concerts), *The Magic Sun* is a masterpiece, a stunning black and white portrait of a masterful musical collective.

Shot between 1967 and 1968, both inside and on the rooftop of Ra's Second Avenue apartment in New York City, *The Magic Sun* reaches deep inside the Arkestra. Niblock shoots extreme close-ups of the group on high-contrast reversal film stock, whose rich negative images are the ghostly, back of the eyelid





Whiteout: Carsten Nicolai's *Anti Reflex* (exhibition view)

etchings. Rolling pins across faces, fingers, keys and strings are melted together and wristled apart. Niblock employs uncannily timed techniques – superimpositions, defocused shots, desorienting angles, black frames – so organically that the music itself seems to edit the footage. Featuring *The Ancestress* at a peak, when legends Marshall Allen, Pat Patrick and John Gumaure were all at full stilet, the featured sange ("Celestial Fantasy," from *When Angels Speak Of Love*, and "The Shadow World," from *The Magic City*) swim from a squawking opening through a swinging, bass-led middle to a diving, horn frenzy of a finale.

Perhaps *The Magic Sun*'s biggest achievement is, much like *Ra*'s best work – how it renders the concrete and the abstract indistinguishable. By using identifiable images at the outset, Niblock encourages the viewer to seek objects in each subsequent frame, but things slowly become less distinct. By the film's end, the accelerating montage is made mostly of shards of light that still look like fingers plucking strings, lips pushing air and arms flexing into instruments. It's an excellent analogy to Sun *Ra*'s music – identifiable sounds morphing into abstraction – and in that sense, the *Magic Sun* may be the ultimate music video.

**CARSTEN NICOLAI:  
ANTI REFLEX  
FRANKFURT SCHIRN  
KUNSTHALLE  
GERMANY**

BY ROB YOUNG

You could say Carsten Nicolai has finessed the art of getting to the point. His electronic *Noto* music is all about cutting out all extraneous frequencies, leaving a desert of edges, clicks, whines and

rumbles. For *Anti Reflex* – his largest solo show to date – he has turned up the contrast knob to 11. It's divided into two rooms, one bleached white, the other annihilating black. A corridor connects them, plastered with *Visual Rhythm* (2003), a wallpaper and floor covering of Nicolai's design, using equal-thickness strips of black and white, creating a wobbling moiré effect. The white room is about controlled experiments and demonstrable mathematics. Physical phenomena are manifested transparently, in relief, in glass or on screens. The dark room harbours veiled science: light and sound have been gendered opposite; it's all afterimage, blue-grey glimmers of cognition flashed on the retina in a chamber drained of light.

In a world where nations are diagnosed as "on the right/wrong side of freedom's divide" (by prescription of Dr C Rice of Washington, DC), polarity and politics have never been more familiar bedfellows. Nicolai's sculpture can be super-narrated, but his new video work *Spray* (2004) on first glance is nothing more than a tipping and granulating supposition of white pixels on black, their stochastic slide reminiscent of John Conway's *Life* simulation. Soon geometric triangular forms become discursive, betraying their derivation from digital film of an American military Stealth bomber. *Telefonken* – Bridget Riley-like horizontal line paintings using slips of magnetic tape cause dizzy sensations of imbalance as you approach the active plane. The disorientation jars your sensory radar. These are abstractions of the polarised realities of modern imperial warfare that claims to bring the light of democracy to territories assumed to be reading in darkness.

Each of the works in the rooms has its counterpart or antithesis – a negative or positive version of itself. *Anti Reflex* and *Reflex* themselves are

three-dimensional, three metre tall versions of the mysterious geometric polyhedron from Albrecht Dürer's enigmatic 1514 engraving, *Melanchoelia I*. *Reflex*, installed in the white room, is hollow, big enough to hold three or four people, and piece microspeakers glued to the faces bounce frequencies from node to node, supposedly "drawing" a second invisible solid inside the space. In practice the piece was too subtle for the art, and struggled to get its idea across. In the black room, his *Anti* counterpart is an impenetrable, impenetrable lamp of blackness, barely visible in the gloom. Implanted with sub-bass speakers, its faces appear to bubble and separate under your touch, so deep and powerful are the vibrations from within. Nicolai loves to exploit the physical properties of frequencies less due to use, highlighting their physical effects. Here, the dramatic setting intensified the psychological effect too.

In the *Anti* room, a pair of flat widescreen TVs are mounted close to and facing the wall. Their intermittent flashes left afterimages on the black surface, resembling giant eyeballs (the inverse of his television piece *Telefonken*, where TV screens display information read from Nicolai's *Noto* audio CDs as horizontal lines of interference).

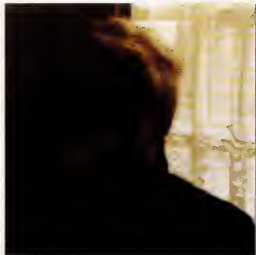
Most metaphysical of them all, Nicolai's matched glass vacuum tubes – plated on the inside, giving the appearance of polished aluminium – were stoppered by Nicolai in 2002 while standing in a room which was being filled with a hypersonic sonic throbs. Does the sound continue to reverberate inside these vacuum-packed microuniverses? Like Baron Munchausen's tale of brown hurrying huns blowing out their noses as they saw in front of a fire, perhaps these flecks would emit their rumbles again if one of the stoppers were eventually removed. This piece, and

an exquisite black wall of minuscule white LEDs flickering and fusing like a visual click – cuts track, highlights Nicolai's connections with German early industrial Romanticism, especially the painter Johann Hummel's renderings of the wonders of modern engineering in all its lustro, alien beauty.

Nicolai's antithesis is the open liquid wave tanks of Makhnovskina (2000), whose complex disturbance patterns register sub-bass frequencies. Unlike a physics experiment, these require considerable personal orientation in order to perceive the white-on-white ripple effects. His confidence using this mode of de/monstration of physics lab practice now extends to being in two terms of scientific apparatus. The polarity between these underpins the whole show: in the white room, one of the largest artificially grown crystals in the world – a perfect cylindrical lens, formed of rigid symmetrical molecules, which is being groomed as the next generation of computer chips; the expression of order underdetermined in the black room by the inclusion of a diffusion cloud chamber, Nebelkammer (2002), a refrigerated vessel that illustrates the trails of charged particles, providing a window on the "veiled motion" of the random motions of the subatomic world. The tension between order and chaos is also inscribed in the glass panes of *Perfect Square* (2004), which illustrates the only possible arrangement of the maximum number of squares of different sizes that fit inside the boundary of a larger square, as discovered by a Russian mathematician in 1978. His icy logic astounds, especially in Nicolai's stepped rendering, but, as an elderly English lady once remarked of the interior of Chartres Cathedral, it must be a bigger to dust. □

# The Inner Sleeve

Artwork selected this month by David Shrigley



## PALACE DAYS IN THE WAKE

DOMINO 1994  
UNKNOWN PHOTOGRAPHER

## BONNIE 'PRINCE' BILLY MASTER AND EVERYONE

DOMINO 2003  
COVER PHOTO BY STEVE GALLICK

Being a late convert to the music of Palace, Bonnie 'Prince' Billy, and so on, I first heard

Days In The Wake in 1995, a year after it came out. Strangely it was untitled at that point, yet it acquired the title on its rerelease. I've always assumed the cover was a portrait of Will Oldham and I am led to believe that is the case, although I can't be sure; the image is so ambiguous that it's hard to know what you're looking at. I remember examining the record in the shop with some curiosity long before I heard it. The name of the artist only appeared

on the spine and thus the record had a PALACE sticker on it to establish its identity. I've always liked record packaging that makes no concession to marketing.

I like the image of BPB on *Master And Everyone* because it seems to place him as the slightly anachronistic character he is: the digicam-type style photo suggests a hairy American pioneer until you notice his three-pierced ear. Given that BPB is the sixth name

Oldham has recorded under, perhaps a search for an identity has taken place. Maybe he didn't really know who he wanted to be at the time of *Days In The Wake* so it's difficult to make him out on the cover. I think the actor has finally found his character in the Bonnie Prince — hence the sharp pull into focus. [...] David Shrigley is a visual artist. His solo exhibition at New York's Arton Ram Gallery runs from 3 March–2 April.

## Go To:

If you are a part of the iPod fraternity or own any other similar MP3 playing device, chances are you still source your own MP3s manually. Thanks to Adam Curry, sometime MTV VJ and general technical whiz, this might soon be a thing of the past. Curry developed the Podcast some time ago, which is now undergoing something of a surge. Similar to a blog, only in audio, anyone can create a Podcast, and anyone can download it, listen to it at any time of day anywhere. As broadcasting corporations are still getting their head around Web streaming, Websites such as **Ipodcast** ([www.ipodcast.org](http://www.ipodcast.org)), **Podcast** ([www.podcast.net](http://www.podcast.net)) and **Podcast Alley** ([www.podcastalley.com](http://www.podcastalley.com)) are booming. It's simple: you download a software application, subscribe to a Podcasting service that suits your tastes, and at back and receive programmes to your machine automatically as they are produced. **Brainwashed** ([brainwashed.com](http://brainwashed.com)) regularly produce Podcasts featuring artists such as Nurse With Wound, Matmos, Kid606, Diamanda Galas and many others. **Automatiksounds**

([automatiksounds.com/radio](http://automatiksounds.com/radio)) describe themselves as "a mysterious feed from Wisconsin, featuring the best of folk, experimental, musique concrète, noise, anti-folk, etc", while **Vinylpodcast** ([vinylpodcast.com](http://vinylpodcast.com)) features songs from a collection of out of print 45s and LPs, mostly concentrating on Rare Grooves, soul and folk, and there's a programme called **The Good Shit** ([www.thegoodshit.co.uk](http://www.thegoodshit.co.uk)) which promises to broadcast a seamless mix of "everything good" from The Band to Big Black.

Podcasts are by no means limited to music stations. You can plug into specialist areas like philosophy, aviation, beer, law and if coding's your bag, Adam Curry hosts his own programming Podcast, **The Daily Source Code** ([dailysourcecode.com](http://dailysourcecode.com)).

If you have trouble keeping up with new weird Americans, skewed folk or resurrected legends, **Foxy Digitalis** ([www.digitalisandusties.com/foxyd/](http://www.digitalisandusties.com/foxyd/)) is a great online zine for information, interviews, columns and reviews centred around troubadours such as Six Organs Of

Admittance, Tower Recordings, Birchville Cat Motel, Sunburned Hand Of The Man, Vashh Bunyan, Simon Finn and many others.

If you'd rather be producing your own sounds, then the **Chain Tape Collective** ([www.ctc-collective.com](http://www.ctc-collective.com)) is open to new members. Starting as a chain letter in tape form, with contributors supplying one track each, the Chain Tape Collective was initiated by one Michael Klotzsch. A master tape would circulate in the United States and Europe, before being cleared up and distributed to each contributor. Since then they have simplified the process by everyone supplying a track directly to the complex 80 musicians strong, the Chain Tape Collective now produce CDs rather than tapes. The four initial releases are the original tape projects, but more recently the projects are feed around a concept — field recordings, vocal samples, acoustic, Ambient, percussive and so on. Their next challenge is to meld 12 tone techniques with dance music. Anyone who feels a calling should get in touch.

ANNE HILDE NESET



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The Green House Trust

# On Location

Live and kicking: festivals, concerts, events on the flesh





Opposite page (clockwise from top left): Monotect, Double Loops, Magik Markers, Kim Gordon; Above: Paul Fishery, Neutral Alarm

## NOISE AGAINST FASCISM WASHINGTON DC BLACK CAT USA

BY MARC MASTERS

20 January was a cold day in Washington DC, due partly to the weather, but mostly to a chilly ceremony—the Presidential Inauguration—that blocked streets, closed shops and generally froze the city. Anticipating this event, Chris Gier and Sonic Youth's Thurston Moore organized an evening in response. Bluntly dubbed *Noise Against Fascism*, the pair recruited 11 groups, many of whom are friends and collaborators, in a sense that has become near-annual since Carlos Giffoni's galvanizing *No Fun Fest* in Brooklyn last spring. Each act was granted 15 minutes to deliver whatever form of aural objection they deemed fit.

Few verbal protests were actually heard, but their restless, uncompromising noise is its own kind of dissent. The night seemed more about cathartic delirium and sonic abandon than political gravity, with performers yelling and roaring happily from the side of the stage during most sets. Perhaps the best political statement was the mere presence of *To Live And Shave In L.A.* Rat Bastard, the John Doherty of noise and an ardent to the anti-seriousness of the city. As he pushed repeatedly to the front of the crowd, he sloshed yelps and beer-clutching fist pumps (plus a hilarious plea for better music between acts) both perplexed and ignited the audience, most of whom appeared to have no idea who he was.

First onstage were Massachusetts' Believers, a quartet clad in hospital white who wrung out a quick swirl of broken rock to a lucky few, since most of the audience were still bottlenecked in a line at the club entrance. Chicago duo Melalia followed with an authoritative blurt, first banging on amplified wooden swords, then sliding into a transfixing swarm of dissonant guitar riffs and tape-looped vocals. Things truly caught fire during a massive set by Brooklyn's Double Loops, the current word masters of physically affecting drone. Screeching at their mics as if trying to light sticks of dynamite with their breath, the two quailed devoutly over pedal-filled suitcases, generating large waves of skeleton-shaking sound that included the broiling bellows of an over-amped tuba.

Following their fury was New York's Monotect, who have recently morphed from a laptop-driven affair into a hypnotic, demented power trio. As Carlos Giffoni alternated between preprogrammed rhythmic blurs and peepack pickup, Roger Ramirez smashed together an epileptic drum attack and Nancy Garcia pulled at a mess of overstretched bass strings, the trio's songs seemed to collapse and reassemble, making for the quickest 15 minutes of the evening. The all-female Ohio quintet 16 Bitch Ple-Up felt more like an art school project than a group, but the lip-syck shrieks of Sarah Benati and the tumultuous acoustics of Brooke Zarnade earned an enthusiastic crowd response.

At this point, it was hard to tell that the night hadn't even reached the halfway mark.

The first half occurred during Bazzardstain, the DJ duo of Nautical Almanac's Twig Harper and Wolf Eyes' Nate Young, dressed in leather jackets and chain-wrapped bedsheet hoods. Their jackhammered needle noise and sandpapered Led Zepplin samples were a shot of adrenaline, but their set outlasted its inspiration. Even Moore and Kim Gordon, who were waiting to follow them, seemed to lose interest. The debut performance of that pair's project, *Mirror/Dash*, focused mostly on Gordon. As Moore slumped on the side of the stage, seeking quiet feedback from his acoustic guitar, Gordon began with too-sombre strumming, but her chilling moans about a cowboy and sinuous chest-wrangling brought the set to a fast-forward conclusion.

As if inspired by Monotect's earlier rock deconstructions, Baltimore's Nautical Almanac spit out a wobbly set of near-songs, flamed by the rubbery bass strutting of Harper and the moaning wail scapes of Cady Plak. With the night's delirious tenor re-established, the sax/drums duo of Paul Fishery and Chris Corsane escalated to heights not seen since Double Loops departed. Recalling a time when free jazz men existed was a political statement, the pair were a manic, blurry whirlwind of exhausting blast. Corsane's stature as a one-man working crew is by now firmly established. His playing elevates everything it touches, effortlessly springing ahead while the rest of us struggle to tread water.

The final two acts were ostensibly the

headliners, despite the evening's all-for-one feel. The bratty rock of Connecticut trio Magik Markers was impressive in its penetrating volume and rolling density, though somewhat monotonous in its brashness. At times conjuring a snottier version of Rudolph Grey's Blue Humans, they were easily the loudest group of the evening, a feat they seemed very proud of. To Live And Shave In L.A. arrived in supergroup form. Their nucleus of Rat Bastard, Tom Smith and Ben Wolcott augmented by Moore, Gier, Don Fleming and Andrew WK, hidden in the shadows of his mega-pro drumkit. Supposedly defunct after their first album in 2002, they have undergone a recent, frantic resurrection. This is due largely to the enthusiasm of the kind of groups making up this evening's bill, for whom *To Live And Shave In L.A.*'s noisy anti-music is a clear role model. With their set orbiting croakily around the hypnotic histrionics of the grunting Smith, the spilling mass of guitar slosh threatened to dissolve into tedious, but resilient ebbs and swells persisted. Building to a sweetly thro, the onstage chaos (including a gear-endangering wrestling match between Rat Bastard and Monotect's Ramirez) matched both the group's crashing music and the entire night's ferocious air.

Afterwards, Moore returned to the stage, chanting "we you ready to fight?" while thrusting his mic into the flushed faces of the lingering crowd. After a few scorching affirmations, one final patron responded, "Uh, I'm not sure." Moore's reply summed the evening: "Well, we're all different." [ ]

## On Location



### JULIAN COPE & BAND + COMETS ON FIRE LONDON ROYAL FESTIVAL HALL UK

BY NICK SOUTHGATE

Julian Cope takes the stage bedecked in totems of his various past and present personae. His T-shirt bears the crest of Saint Julian, patron of the Two-Car Garage Rock Band. The belt buckle carries Nietzsche's aphorism "Alas! Ye Not With Monsters, Let Ye Become A Monster", a motto Cope turned under for a while. Crowning his head is the broad-brimmed black hat that shaded him in his toils and traipses across Europe to complete his second gazetteer of prehistoric stone sites, *The Megalithic European*. As self-aware as he is garrulous about songs, he pinpoints his own predicament precisely: "I keep trying to do things that are new, but

instantly they've subsumed into the tradition and become old."

Tonight's two sets, however, add generously to the tradition, in what Cope declares to be the beginning of his "second psychedelic incarnation", his undiminished appetite for performance sees him take the stage at a prompt 7.30pm, before many of his regular fans have welcomed in the bathwater and left home. The new album, *Citizen Can't*, is drawn on heavily, its loose-linked guitar/bass/drums fundamentals played out in the spotlights by loyal henchmen Donald Ross-Skinner and Daggen.

*Citizen Can't* represents a creatively fertile middle ground between Cope the (jovely) prolific troubadour and Cope the leader of a bad-assed barbarian axe-wielding rock 'n' roll raiding party. The group know his antics well enough to endlessly extend set opener "Hanging Out And

Hung Up On The Line" to give Cope carte blanche to savage the audience. When not raving and roving through the stalls he can pick up a guitar. The full group are eerily and impressive and play a menacing version of the cyclical dust-guitar riff faecal ballad "Feels Like It's A Crying Shame" to close the first set.

Cope exits stage left and Comets On Fire unleash their full-throttle psych cacophony into the unprepared virgin acoustic of the Royal Festival Hall. Live, their sound is devoid of the acoustic guitar interludes that varied the dynamics of their recordings. Instead the group work each song towards moribund slumping, stomping triple choiced fists, a right-left-right pummeling of primal intent, as inchoate, awesome and immediate as the rages of an infant demigod or fanged and furred behemoth.

Cope returns to the stage for a second set that

draws from right across his 25 years of recording. Venerable tearling Explodes numbers "Reward" and "Bouncing Babies" delight, the latter still as immediately indignant as it once was from the mouth of its then teenage author. The new album's apocalyptic protest song "World War Pigs" hangs feld and fierce over the audience. The climax arrives with a grindingly sluggish riff through the redemptive rocker "Sasachopper" before Cope rips his way through one of his favoured canvases for reverberation, "Reynard the Fox".

Tonight the song's monologue of isolation and immolation comes to a thumping, thudding crescendo with Cope writhing against the mic stand, rending open his shirt and baring his breast ribboned with blood to the faithful of the front rows. He retires beaming and asplendent, over the showman, over the shaman. □

## STEVE REICH LONDON BARBICAN HALL

BY MIKE BARNES

Anticipation was high at Ensemble Modern's UK premiere of Steve Reich's new piece, *You Are* (Variations), which earned enthusiastic press when first performed in the US last year. Although Reich is a constantly questing composer, recent compositions have varied in quality (they have ranged from the truly innovative (*The Cave*), while the well realised *City Life* was somewhat less exciting than promised.

The first half, concentrating on older material, began with one of Reich's strongest pieces, *Eight Lines*, written in 1979 and revised four years later. The composer himself has stumbled over

questions about the emotional content of his work, apparently unsure quite what to say about what is essentially a lyrical take on pure process. But a few minutes into the composition, the perpetual motion piano, slow, yearning, seersucker strings, and exquisitely pointed flute, piccolo and bass clarinet fold into a multilayered mix of textures, timbres, light and shade that is quite breathtaking. Unlike some of his other pieces, where the instruments are amplified, the small ensemble perform it tonight without amplification, even though it would have given the sound a lot more presence.

Based on Hebrew texts, *Yahilim* (1981) sounds like nothing else — either in Reich's oeuvre or the classical repertoire as a whole. Sung by four sopranos, the performance sounds more vital and expansive than his own ECM recording. Over an ensemble of winds, strings, keyboards and percussion, the first movement's mix of clapping and percussion pulses in a mood somewhere between a stiel and a dance

of celebration. Reich's typically short, gradually accumulated phrases coalesce to longer melody lines with vocal canons of exceptional complexity. Apart from a point in the first movement, where the writing gives as an ear-ringing congestion of high notes, this is a joyous piece, with its gorgeous slow movement marked out by tolling vibraphones.

*Yahilim* was the piece that enticed Reich's interest in the inherent musicality of the patterns of speech to shape his rhythms and melodies. *You Are* (Variations) covers similar ground. Here Reich utilises six vocalists, four pianos, percussion, winds and strings. It finds the composer revisiting all that he does best, while nodding back to the dancing-tuned percussion that characterised *Septet* and the stark, staccato shuffling of voices and keyboards that characterised *Music For 18 Musicians* and *The Desert Music*.

Using a number of short philosophical text extracts, the variations in question draw the

listener into a musical maze that's much more convincing than Reich's laboured *Malinconia For Winds, Strings And Keyboards*. The ensemble writing is nobler than usual for Reich, with some uncharacteristic atonality and striking effects from the doubling up of voices and flutes, while the strings swap rhythms with the four tuned percussionists. There are some tremendous vocal harmonies, especially during the brief slow movement of the 27 minute piece, which is well and truly amplified and comes across at considerable volume.

Although these elements are all somewhat familiar, Reich has found a new rhythmic fluidity and rediscovered a feeling of spontaneity — there is constant movement within a template, which it itself changes shape as the piece progresses. Although it might not quite be up there with his most inspired work, *You Are* (Variations) finds him working with, if not a new language exactly, then stringing new threads within that language. □

Some kind of monster: Julian Cope (opposite, top) Bottom: Kenny Wheeler

## KENNY WHEELER 75TH BIRTHDAY CONCERT LONDON QUEEN ELIZABETH HALL

BY ANDY HAMILTON

Kenny Wheeler's work as a pioneer of free improv with Spontaneous Music Ensemble in the 1960s contrasts with his remarkable impressing and composition in more straightforward areas — but he's always been concerned to overcome the divisions in improvised music. His birthday concert received the forces of the landmark *Music For Large And Small Ensembles* (ECM 1990). The Canadian trumpeter with a love of Ellington and Hindemith studied at Tenet Conservatory, and later with Stan Kenton's

arranger Bill Russo — strange to compare the bombast of Kenton with Wheeler's thoughtful, often melancholy compositions and arrangements. Arriving in Britain in 1952, he partnered the leading players of British pop before turning to free improv with John Stevens and Evan Parker, and going on to work with Anthony Braxton in the 70s.

As well as pieces from the ECM classic, the concert premiered Suite 2005 commissioned by Radio 3 for 18 piece big band. His compositions are highly sectional, with abrupt patches of mood and tempo — a patchwork quality — but the way it's done is incredibly skilful. The results seemed, if anything, sharper than *Music For Large And Small Ensembles*, the harmonies more daring and complex.

The concert featured players long associated with Wheeler — Lee Konitz, Evan Parker, bassist Dave Holland and Norma Winstone — plus, in the big band, such British players from the ECM album as Ian Hawkey, Henry Lowther, Duncan Lammont and Ray Warleigh: John Pernocelli was on guitar and Martin Francis on drums. The concert began with two pieces for sextet, featuring 77 year old altoist Lee Konitz in a masterly solo on his own "Subconscious-Lee".

On "Mark Time", Evan Parker and trombonist and conductor Hugh Fraser were added. Audiences will be less familiar with Parker's command of chord- and groove-based jazz, though his free eruption at the end of the piece seemed an abrupt transition. More effective was a free cadenza in the latter part of the suite that

grew organically out of the ensemble, leading into a poignant statement of the theme by the leader. On the elegant arrangement of "How Deep Is The Ocean", Konitz was in his element, his solo as cunning as any he's produced. After him came Julian Argüelles, almost deafened by his baritone sax.

As an impression, Kenny Wheeler's motto is "leave some space" — be aware of what everyone else is doing. Pianist Gwilym Simcock has yet to learn this, but his fluid, meticulously undulating solos were a joy — the excitement that can result from not leaving space was palpable. Despite a recent minor stroke Wheeler is still playing brilliantly, and this was an awesome musical genius of his undiminished compositional genius. □

## THE SOUND OF HEAVEN AND EARTH LONDON TATE MODERN

BY CLIVE BELL

Señi Kim-Cohen has organised a multi-disciplinary conference at Tate Modern titled *Heaven And Earth*. So tonight's show is *The Sound Of Heaven And Earth*, which Kim-Cohen calls a "structuralist composition". A zodiac of mainly heavyweight improvisers line up to pit their wits against six composers, whose brief is to communicate a "sound score" to the players: no notes on paper, no wiring of arms, all instructions must go in via the ears.

The audience fill up the comfy seats of the Tate's Start Auditorium. Every inch of this room is

lived in, and while cosy enough as a cinema, it's not here you would call a music venue. An awful, high art atmosphere hangs heavy in here, which the performers struggle to dissipate.

California based Eric Roth spins proceedings with *Secret Cheese*. The performers receive their orders from a CD walkman over headphones and start playing, soon wandering off into a New Music desert with no signposts. Eventually Tony Bear's lyrical bass saxophone lines are answered by John Edwards's double bass tremolo, and a rich group texture develops. Next, Achim Waldschied from Frankfurt produces a more transparent process. 30 seconds of free playing is followed by 30 seconds of freely processed sound from Waldschied's laptop, as he throws back a version of what has just been

heard. The musicians respond to the android seersade, and on we go. As with Roth's piece, once the expressiveness, gestural spitting is out of the way, the music settles to a reverting group exploration.

Olav Ni (aka Sen-Cohen himself) weaves a rest hat, structures his composition by mixing a red bell, and periodically whispers in the performers' ears (one whisper causing a fully engorged Edwards to jump out of his skin). This modest theatricality spoils up the party, and the music is a warm, entangled undergrowth. David Grubbs and Kalle Matthews both continue to turn the ensemble into a rich, harmonious organ. Matthews carrels out the venue's stiffness by extinguishing the lights and surrounding listeners with players. David Toop's quavering flute

overtones and Rhodi Davies's E-bowed harp transport us to a more mysterious place. Andrew W Morgan's electronics and Neil Heyde's wonderfully precise cello also work for an all too brief 15 minutes. Finally Luc Ferret's *Butoligos 3* sets up a game where elements are rotated and their predictability played with. Ferret himself structures the piece by photographing the performers to the cue of his stopwatch.

With musicians this creative, a worry lurks that, left to their own devices, the music might be even more surprising. Wielding composers impose discipline on improvisers can be a mixed blessing. However, the moments of beauty, particularly from Grubbs and Matthews, made for a worthwhile evening. □







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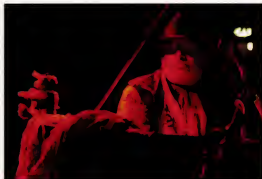
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This month's selected festivals, live events, clubs and broadcasts.

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Charlesmae Palantia at Elter (left), Carsten Nicola detained in Germany



## UK festivals

### AFRICA REMIX

#### LONDON

Concert series celebrating the range of contemporary African music and culture continues until April. Concerts include South African trumpeter Claude Deppa and African Omas (10 March), Ombasa founder and trombonist Abdul Raheem with his ten piece group from Ghana (12), South African Guitars! Lucky Renski (13), Makin blues from Beusbeac Troop (18), Nigerian Abrobeat with pianist and singer Ojo Ojo (23), South Africa's Lucky Renski, Ghana's Kan Bennehman and Sema Leone's Abdul Tee Jay (27), Congolese Soukous (30), Senegal's Baaba Maal with full group and dancers (1 April), and cool, intoxicating Afrofunk from Nigeria's King Sunny Ade (16). London Royal Festival Hall, Queen Elizabeth Hall & Purcell Room, various times and prices, 073 800 400, [www.africaremix.org.uk](http://www.africaremix.org.uk)

### ETHER

#### LONDON

The Wire is official sponsor of this experimental series on London's South Bank. German electronic music pioneers Michael Rother (of Neu!) and Dieter Moebius (of Cluster) are supported by Ginehead (featuring Robin Rimbaud and Wire's Colin Newman) and They Came From The Stars I Saw Them (14 March), Doose Rasool plus Tony Allen (15), Matmos, Charlesmae Palestine, Zeena Parkins & Ilse Mon and Cyclob (19), and London Sinfonietta performing a new work by Radiohead's Jonny Greenwood as well as works by Pärtel and Messiaen in a bill shared with The Nazareth Orchestra who perform traditional Arabic song (27 & 28), London South Bank, various times and prices, 073 800 400, [www.ether.org.uk](http://www.ether.org.uk)

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### MICROFEST

#### LONDON

Major celebration of microtonal music featuring works by Harry Partch, Giacinto Scelsi, Christopher Fox, Michael Parsons, Hiroshi Radetsky, Frank Denyer, John Lely and others. The weekend also includes talks by Partch biographer Bob Gilmore, composer Christopher Fox and founder of the Centre for New Musical Instruments, Patrick O'Leary-Low. London St Cyprian's Church, 18 & 19 March, £3-10 per session or £15-£25 for the weekend, 020 8546 1424, [www.microtonalprojects.co.uk](http://www.microtonalprojects.co.uk)

## International festivals

### ARS MUSICA

#### BELGIUM

Contemporary music festival focusing this year on compositions for the voice. Featured composers will be Olga Neuwirth, Karlheinz Stockhausen and Tristan Mural. There will also be works by Zoltán Kodály, Peter Vermeersch, Giacinto Scelsi, Thierry De Mey, Bela Bartók, Luciano Berio, Jean-Luc Falcamp and others. Brussels various venues, 3-20 March, 00 32 2 542 1122, [www.arsmusica.be](http://www.arsmusica.be)

### BANLIEUES BLEUES

#### FRANCE

Out there jazz festival whose highlights include David Murray's Pouchkine (11 & 12 March), The Thing (15), Louis Sclavis Quartet and Paolo

Angel solo (21), McCoy Tyner Trio (25), Spang Heel Jack with Leo Wadada Smith and Evan Parker plus Pool Players featuring Benoit Delbecq and Steve Alcorn (30), Evan Parker Trio plus Wadada Leo Smith's Golden Quartet (31), Anthony Braxton Sextet and Fred Anderson Trio (8), Charles Gayle Quartet and Spiritual Unity featuring Marc Ribot and Henry Grimes (12) and Steve Coleman & The Five Elements (13). Saint-Denis various venues, times & prices, 14 March-16 April, 00 33 1 4922 1010, [www.banlieuesbleues.org](http://www.banlieuesbleues.org)

### BOREALIS 05

#### NORWAY

A week-long celebration of Terry Riley's 70th Birthday Concerts with Riley, Krishna Shakti, Mihai Melnic, Glyn Riley, Stefano Soudanikro, The Vigil Band, Zubeika, Bergen Harding fiddle 'in C' Orchestra, Vebekastad Orchestra, Solityphong, N-Collective, 9 Best Strich as well as screenings, workshops and debates. Bergen various venues, times and prices, 13-20 March, [www.borealifestival.no](http://www.borealifestival.no)

### DALLE NUOVE MUSICHE AL SUONO MONDIALE

#### ITALY

Diverse concert series with Abdelhak Alkane & Your Grouse (3 March), Biosphere (6), Radiodivert (10), ICP Orchestra (15), Jorge Drexler (22), Christian Fennesz (31), Egothorac (5 April), Mu (7), Margherita Kammmerer (12), Erik Truffa Ladyland Quartet featuring Maura Toudi (15), William Parker Quartet (19), Jason Forrest aka Donna Summer (21), Radican (26) and David Murray & The Gwo-Ka Masters (28). Torino Café Procope & Teatro Juvarra, 3 March-28 April, [www.musica89.net](http://www.musica89.net)

### EXPLOSIVES!

#### BEELGIUM

New festival that includes a Mutant Hip-hop night alongside live performances by Phil Minton & Jaxx Blank, Erik M & MC Ferrari and others. Brussels Les Halles, 10-19 March, [www.halles.be](http://www.halles.be)

### FEMMES

#### GERMANY

Two evenings showcasing experimental female artists featuring performances, collaborations, installations and 'surprises' from Ilse Morl, Zeena Parkins, Agi, Samara Lubelski, Tara Barbe (Fursua), Heather Leigh, Zaveloka, Hild Sofie Tjoford, Lotta Meier, Esther Verhey, Danielle Lemare, Lookie, Maskemachine, Onashita and others. Hasselt Kunstencentrum & Open Circuit, 4 & 5 March, 7pm, 10 Euros per day, 13 Euros for two days, 00 32 11 224161, [www.open-circuit.com](http://www.open-circuit.com)

### UN FEST

#### HUNGARY

Experimental electronic music festival featuring Tin Hecser, Jozsef Nemesi, EMM, Kalle Matthes, Kevin Bleckhorn, BJ Miller, Fennszi, Radian, Institut für Feinmotorik, Fluxmen with Julie Ouse, Philipp Quehenberger, Jan Jelenek, Keith Fullerton Whitman, Khan, Eckehard Ehlers, Flying Lullabichers, Thigpaulandina, Lufschütz Jaki, Nasagt, Oblek, Pita and many others. Budapest, 24-27 March, [www.fest.hu](http://www.fest.hu)

### IDEALFESTIVAL

#### SWEDEN

Third edition of this festival on the west coast of Sweden. Alongside experimental films, performance art and talks, a wide-ranging music bill includes Whitehouse, Fennesz, Keith Rowe, a Rhythm & Sound 45 Session, Carsten Nicola, Mekka, Khosher, The Microphones, Drop The Lime, Karle Mathews and others. Gothenburg various venues, 10-12 March, [www.idealfestival.se](http://www.idealfestival.se), [www.refers.se](http://www.refers.se)

### KRAAK

#### BELGIUM

One day festival featuring psych folk acts and new jazz from the US and Europe. Performances include So Organic Of Admittance, Murgan, Carsten Rainbow Octave Of Admittance, Fettes, Boris, David Grigs Old Stoner, Smeigra, Kiss The Anus Of A Black Cat, Undog, The Microphones

and Magic Markers. Hasselt KC België, 12 March, noon-midnight, 13-15 Euros, 00 32 92199143, [www.raaknet.be](http://www.raaknet.be)

# MAERZMUSIK GERMANY

Major new music festival featuring Cansin Nicolas, David Moss, Chris Mann, Antio Lindoy, London Sirenistas & Mira Coda, Ensemble Modern, Cansin Nicolas as well as works by Walter Zimmermann, Giancarlo Sisti, Benedetto Mason, Jonathan Harvey, Dieter Schnebel, Gedy Light, John Cage, Agnes Lin, Squamper and many more. Berlin various venues, times & prices, 3-13 March, [www.maezmusik.de](http://www.maezmusik.de)

# MUSICA NOVA HELSINKI FINLAND

International festival of contemporary music with a focus on UK composers including Julian Anderson, James Dillon, Jonathan Harvey, Mark Anthony Turnage and Paul McCartney. Finnish composers include John Talgorn, Rikio Tahvira and Veli-Matti Puumala, while other international guests include The Octone Quartet, Joe Lovano and Mike Gibbs. Helsinki, 4-12 March, [www.musicanova.fi](http://www.musicanova.fi)

# SJU JAZZ FESTIVAL NETHERLANDS

Dutch out jazz weekend featuring Marc Ducret Trio, Eric Burdon/Thomas Heberer, The Astronauts featuring Joost Bak, Dave Douglas & Norrad (18 March) and Tobias Delius solo, Lotz Of Music featuring Mark Albar Lotz, Gunkling Festival/Gaunt Cassie and Chico Freeman Quartet (19), Utrecht, 18 & 19 March, 00 31 30 231 4544, [www.sju.nl](http://www.sju.nl)

# WHAT IS MUSIC? AUSTRALIA

Australia's foremost experimental music fest celebrates its tenth anniversary in March with a strong, eclectic bill put together by Oree Ambroschi and Robbie Avrami featuring The Residents, Par Sank, Sam Olli, Black Ode, Gang Gang Dance, Sir Richard Bishop, The Dead C, Kevin Drumm, Alan Lamb, OXOXO, Lightning Bolt, Growing, Andrew Khodoni and others.

Melbourne, Sydney & Brisbane various venues, 1-13 March, [www.whatismusic.com](http://www.whatismusic.com)

# Special events

## THE BUGGRAND ALL ENVELOPING SOUND SHOW UK

Three interactive installation works combining sound and vision by Tom Bogs including a radical reworks of Steve Reich's Pendulum Music and Alvin Lucier's Music On A Long Thin Wire, Bristol Hen Gallery, 26 February-11 March, Tues-Sat 12.30-4.30pm, 01179 422222, [www.thugrandmore.co.uk](http://www.thugrandmore.co.uk)

## DESIGN & MUSIC FOR DIALOGUE UK

An exhibition of sound sculptures and invented instruments by Victor Gama, Skerford The Hub, until 28 March, Mon-Sat 5am-5pm, Sun 10am-5pm, free, 01529 308710, [www.thehubcentre.org](http://www.thehubcentre.org)

## DRONESHIFT USA

A four hour constantly mutating drone performed in overlapping shifts by over 30 electronic and acoustic musicians from the San Francisco Bay Area including Gino Robair, Tim Bickley, Ernesto Diaz-Lafuente, Tim Perles and David Skuse. This event is a benefit concert for a local art gallery and performance space, Oakland California 21 Grand Art Gallery and Performance Space, 12 March, 7-11pm, 508.506.001 510 444 7263, [www.21grand.org](http://www.21grand.org)

## THE KNIGHTS OF AWESOME POWER UK

Berk Holiday all right guss-roots over with coaches celebrating from major UK acts. Two rooms of breakcore, gabba, jungle, hardcore and ruff electronics from Buggles Razynski, Panacea, Scam, Spoodrunch, Enduser, Neize Creator, Bryan Farly, Bin Ray, Dolphin & The Invisits, Ely Muff, Simon Underground, Ueberdog, Kutcho, Scheme Boy and Kane. London SE One Club, 25 March, 10pm-6am, £12-£15, [www.adense.com](http://www.adense.com)

[cambnet.net/wwmum.org](http://cambnet.net/wwmum.org)

## LIGHT SCULPTURE ITALY

A reconstructed watermill plays host to an exhibition of sculpture by 14 artists including plans and drawings by Max Neuhaus which evoke his extraordinary sound pieces, and installations by sound artists Rolf Julius, Paolo Pisicelli and Steve Roden. Via Seta 503 Makro, until 20 March, Thurs-Sun 4-7:30pm, free, [www.503makro.com](http://www.503makro.com)

## CHRISTIAN MARCLAY UK

Major retrospective of over 60 works by the Fluxus inspired artist and turntablist. The often surreal and frequently humorous pieces include the works for video Video Quarter and Guitar Drag; and sculptural works Tape Fall, The Studies and the Body Mix series. Accompanying the exhibition, there will be live events in the gallery: The Wire Sound System spins phundephonic records (23 February), Philip Jack breathes life into his orchestra of aging Densette players (30 March) and artist Hayley Newman does a performance inspired by Fluxus strategies (21 April). Barbican Art Gallery until 15 May, 11am-6pm, Tues & Thur 11am-6pm, £8/£6, 0845 120 7550, [www.barbican.co.uk/gallery](http://www.barbican.co.uk/gallery) and for live events [www.electro-producers.com](http://www.electro-producers.com)

## CARSTEN NICOLAI: ANTI-REFLEX GERMANY

The first major exhibition of electronic artist Nicolai's cross-form installations and gallery work which blurs the distinctions between frequencies of sound and light or electromagnetic fields and with an emphasis on technology and minimalism. Frankfurt Schirn Kunsthalle, until 27 March, Wed/Thurs 10am-10pm, Fri-Sun 10am-7pm, 049 6929 9882-0, [www.schirn.de](http://www.schirn.de)

## CARSTEN NICOLAI: SYN CHRON GERMANY

The Wire are supporting this new Nicolai installation in which an electronic composition generates modulations in laser-projected light.

Berlin Neue Nationalgalerie, until 3 April, 00 49 30 615 2702, [www.freunde-galer-muse-berlin.de](http://www.freunde-galer-muse-berlin.de)

## SCHOOL OF SOUND UK

Four days of masterclasses exploring the art of music and sound for film. Speakers include Helmut Goebels, Michel Chen, Piers Plowright, Sally Potter, Chris Plett and Thelma Schoonmaker. London Puzos Forum, 30 March-2 April, £185-£470, 020 7724 6616, [www.schoolofsound.co.uk](http://www.schoolofsound.co.uk)

## SLUM DUNK FILM NIGHT UK

A new series of independent music documentaries from Bristol starts with the world premiere of *I'm Ugly But I'm Proud* by Denise Garcia on the Funk Canova scene from Rio de Janeiro. There is also a showing of *Sansão* featuring a performance by post-Tropicalia act Cabellé and Jarkas Lopes. London Body Arts Centre, 11 March, 7pm, free, 020 73647900, [www.tafine.net](http://www.tafine.net)

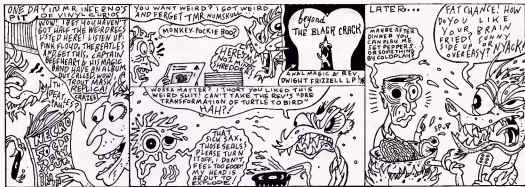
## HARRY SMITH: MUSIC FILM ART LIFE NETHERLANDS

A 'Grand Weekend' dedicated to the life, work and legacy of the American artist, musicologist, collector, director and painter best known for compiling the *Opelot* Anthology of American Folk Music. De Balie cinema will screen all of Smith's film works which combine sound, colour, animation and symbolism. Concurrently, Amsterdam venue Paradiso presents live performances by artists interpreting works from the Anthology including The Handsome Family, Meindert Wolven & The Negroes and David Eugene Edwards' *Woven Hand*. Rani Singh, head of The Harry Smith Archives, will be on hand to give an illustrated presentation on Smith's life and work. Amsterdam The Paradiso & De Balie Cinema, 24-27 February, [www.paradiso.nl](http://www.paradiso.nl), [www.debalie.nl/cinema](http://www.debalie.nl/cinema)

## TRACKS: FIELD RECORDINGS ITALY

A series of talks and performances on various

# Trip Or Squeak





Le Tigre tour (left), The Bohmen Brothers at O'Brien and Sprawl

aspects of UK sound culture past and present that has been curated by the British Council in Rome. The first event features Chris Watson discussing and demonstrating his approach to field and documentary recording. Future events are planned to focus on post-industrial culture, futurism and improvisation. Rome British School Lecture Theatre, 31 March, www.bsc.ac.uk

#### VISUAL MUSIC USA

Exhibition exploring the relationship of music and the visual arts including key paintings by Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee and George O'Keeffe; films and videos by Harry Smith, Oskar Fischinger, Len Lye and John & James Whitney; and installations by Jennifer Steinmark, Neco Savas and others. Los Angeles The Museum of Contemporary Art, until 22 May, call for opening times and prices, 001 213 626 62222, moca.org

#### VISUAL MUSIC: SEE HEAR NOW! USA

Series of live music events to accompany the above exhibition continues with Raster Noton artists Constant Nicolas, Duff Budair, Frank Willems and Daniel (4 March), Travis Preston presents an electronic large scale realisation of David Rosenbaum's Bell Solos (7-9 April), and a weekend of collaborations between composers and filmmakers presented by CaVas (14-16 April). Los Angeles REDCAT & MOCA Grand Avenue, 13 February-22 May, call for times and prices, 001 213 626 62222, moca.org

## On stage

#### DANIEL BIRO & ROB PALMER

Improvising duo on piano/electronics and guitar in a non-stop all-day performance in a museum along with the Pre-Apocalyptic paintings, Japanese artefacts and classical sculptures. Bournemouth The Russell Coates Art Gallery and Museum, 13 March, 11am-4pm, free, 01202 451858, www.sargasso.com

#### DURITT CULLUM

Three Rattle tours in a double bill with guest Azu Bhishin, Leeds Cockpit (24 March), London Islington Academy (14), Stoke-on-Trent The Underground (15) and Manchester The Academy (16)

#### JOSEPHINE FOSTER & THE SUSPENDED + TAURIPUS +

JAMES BLACKSHAW + PETER WRIGHT  
Flattering free folk favesome. Glasgow Mono (14

March) and Aberdeen The Tunnels (15).  
www.vocalcancorus.com

#### LE TIGRE

Premier electro-funk all-star tour. London XFM Camden Oval (10 March), Sheffield Leadmill (13), London Forum (15), Manchester Academy 3 (14), Glasgow O2m Bar (16), Bristol Pacha (20) and Brighton Concorde 2 (21)

#### CHRISTIAN MARCLAY/ STEVE BEERFORD

An evening of compositions by Christian Marclay to accompany the Barbican retrospective of his visual art. Impish keyboardist and low-tech electronics player Steve Beerford performs Marclay's *Gothic* Composition which was created by flyposting 5000 sheets of blank music paper around the city of Berlin and collecting them a few days later. Marclay himself performs *Tablao Rosa* in which he starts by playing record discs without records while his collaborator Jo Kaufmann cuts a vinyl record of the sound. Marclay then uses this vinyl for the next section of the performance. This circular process continues and builds into the final composition

*London Barbican*, 22 March, 7:30pm, £12-50-£15, 0845 120 7550, www.barbican.org.uk

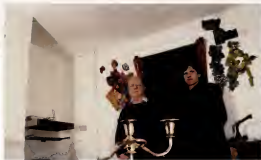
#### MR MCALL'S CHAMBER

Crossover chamber group comprising string quartet, acoustic/electric bass, piano, drums and percussion performing works by Frank Zappa, Kirk Connors, Jo Zawini, Raymond Scott, Astor Piazzolla, Beethoven and more and a new commission by young Scottish composer Kenneth Dempster entitled *Six Feet Of Blood*. London Bush Hall (18 March), Glasgow The Arches (19 April) and Edinburgh The Bargo Club (20), www.mrcalls.co.uk

#### LONDON SINFONETTA: CITY LIFE

Steve Reich's City Life transforms pre-recorded sounds of New York City – car horns, field recordings from the 1993 World Trade Centre bombing, etc – into musical motifs. The concert also features the UK premiere of *Bang On A Can's* Michael Gordon's *Gotham* – this work and the accompanying film by Bill Morrison also has NYC as its subject. The evening is completed by the UK premiere of Mark Anthony Turanga's exuberant and dark work, *Crying Out Loud*. London Queen Elizabeth Hall (11 March, 7:45pm, £5-£21, 08703 800 400, www.rfo.org.uk), www.londonisinfonetta.co.uk

PUSHKIN FEATURING DAVID MURRAY  
US saxophonist and others explore the African



heritage of Russian post-Pushkin through music song and poetry. London Barbican, 13 March, 020 7638 8891, www.barbican.org.uk

#### SLINT

The godfathers of post-rock reunite for the first time since they disbanded in 1991 to play music from their albums *Taxiw*, *Spielband* and posthumous untitled solo. London Forum (2 & 3 March), www.atotalelive.com

#### GÜNTER SOMMER

German improviser joins The Glasgow Improvisers Orchestra for a series of workshops this month and then performs solo (23 March). There is also a showing of the documentary *A Place In Berlin*, which includes footage of a day long concert performance by Sommer and saxophonist Dierk Dierker in light of monuments to Marx and Engels, preceded by a question and answer session with Sommer. Glasgow OCA, 23 March, 8pm, £6/£6, 0141 352 4900, www.cca-glasgow.com

#### HENRI TEXIER

Bass player celebrates his 60th year with a Contemporary Music Network tour. Over the years Texier has worked in a dizzying array of contexts and with collaborators including David Gordon, Dan Cherry, Phil Woods, Owey Redman, Bill Frisell and Louis Schiavo. On this tour he has created a live soundtrack for Jean-Louis Bertucelli's 1970 improvisational film set in the deserts of the Tunisian/Algerian borders. Southampton Turner Sims Concert Hall (13 March), London St Luke's (15), Nottingham Lakeside Arts Centre (16), Brighton Pavilion Theatre, Brighton Dome (17), Manchester Royal Northern College of Music (18), Birmingham CBSO Centre (19) and Gateshead The Sage (20), www.centreofarts.org.uk

#### WILCO

All-rock stars given more space by the guitar work of new member Ben Kelen. Nottingham Rock City (March 13) and London Apollo (14), www.gigsandshows.com, www.wilco.net

## Club spaces

#### BACK IN YOUR TOWN

Monthly event put together by Spring Heel Jack's Ashley Woods. This month features three improvising trios: The Treecreepers (Pete Flood and Ian R Wattson) with Steve Beerford, Rhodri Davies/Phil Durrant/David Toole, Balziska (Mark Westall and Martin) with Tim Goldie. London Red

Rose Club, 17 March, 8:30-11pm, £5/£3, 020 7263 7265

#### BREAKIN' BREED

The breaks and Hip Hop monthly focuses on funk. DJs with Jackson Gersliff, Fryer, Renegade and Junk. Plus guest B-Boy crews Second To None and Foundation and resident Gigs King, Rob Life, Paul T and Kam. London Rhythmic Factory, 26 March, 10am-4am, £5-£9, 020 7375 3774, www.breakinbreed.com

#### CHIBUKU SHAKE SHAKE

Fifth birthday party for the Mersleyade foot shuffler with Ian Brown, The Scratch Pervets, Groove Armada, Bugz In The Attic, Todd Terry, Optikal & Ed Rush, Lays & Bashwackal and others. Liverpool North, 19 March, 10pm-5am, £18-£20, 07813 712935, www.chibuku.com

#### DRONES CLUB

Cosmic music comes to North London at this eclectic monthly. This month sees a return set from ecstatic psychedelic alt 5/7 plus a solo performance by Edward Ke-Spel of The Legendary Pink Dots and the usual Kosmosche and Rastaman FM DJs. London Bostwick Building, 18 March, 8pm-3am, £6, www.frees.org.uk

#### MERZNACHT

An eclectic range of Old sounds from HipHop to deep-wave, from hardcore to voodoo drums plus deformed vocals and live/deconstructed electronic improvisations. Edinburgh Left Bank, Tuesdays, 10pm-3pm, 0131 225 9744

#### MISO

Offbeat Glasgow regular featuring live electronic music from Vessel (aka Gavin Toomey) plus DJ o'cam. Glasgow 13th New Cafe, 5 March, 8pm-midnight, £5, www.lovenoise.com, www.expandingrecords.com

#### OLIGARCH

Two consecutive evenings of improvised music featuring the Skanks duo of Daniel Betton and guitar and film Goldie on drums, drummer Mark Saunders in a duo with Spring Heel Jack's John Cason on guitar, plus Caroline Krasel on solo saxophones (26 March, 8pm), and double bassist John Edwards drums with drummer Goldie and saxophonist John Betton teams up with AMM percussionist Eddie Primm (27, 7pm). London downstairs at the Foundry, free or donation, 020 8525 4796, sarsomajigs@btinternet.com

#### QONINN

This month's name for the Bohmen brothers' informal improvised and experimental music



wooly bring your own drink and be prepared to sit on cushions. Martin Speake/Duncan Hopkins/Anthony Micheli and Rhod Davies/Wade Matthews/Phil Dunsart/Angharad Davies (14 March): Ute Viecker & Chels Alonso, Nicolas Christian & Tara Stuckey and Ol Tondow & The Oppies Dog (21) and Steve Noble & Dominic Lash, Sid Rat, Fyfe Hutchins (28). Mondays, 8pm, £4/£3, 07904 067409

**PROGRESS ANGELS MICROPHONE**  
A new experimental music night for Glasgow. Live performances from laptops, Geminis, the seven string Rutabaga performing on an orchestra of instruments including toys and cars, hummers, vintage electro pop duo Aerther Flux, and mutant jazz outfit Lurker Helsinki. Glasgow: The Universal, 3 March, £5, until 3am, [www.progress-angels-microphone.co.uk](http://www.progress-angels-microphone.co.uk)

**RAY'S JAZZ AT FOYLES**  
Monthly series of live improvised music concerts in the relocated record shop and cafe continues with also saxophonist Martin Speake in a duo with Carribean double bassist Joe Williamson, who has recently relocated to London. Ray's Jazz at Foyles, 31 March, 8pm, free, 020 7404 3205, [www.foyles.co.uk](http://www.foyles.co.uk)

**SPRAWL**  
Sonic buffet of electronica and related digital musics. Fill up your ears this month with sets from the Bohman Brothers, French electronic duo Turner, Brighton duo Rashamon, and Eric Namour. Space filled sound signals are provided by residents huzzs and DJs sit-out and his Geminis. London: Charterhouse Bar, 9 March, 7:30-11:30pm, £4/£3, 020 7658 0658, [www.sprawl.london.co.uk](http://www.sprawl.london.co.uk)

**WARRINGTON IMPROVISED MUSIC COLLECTIVE**  
A concert featuring the duo of Mark Westall & Rhod Davies who switch between acoustic instruments – cello, prepared harp, singing bowls, etc. – to electronic source materials with support from Vinehead. Warrington: The Pyramid Arts Centre, 26 March, 7:30-11pm, 01925 442345, £5, [www.pyramid.co.uk](http://www.pyramid.co.uk)

## Incoming

### LAURIE ANDERSON: THE END OF THE MOON

UK  
New solo show combining music and narrative in a meditation on space travel, war, consumerism and spirituality. London: Barbican, 18-21 May, £15-£35, 0845 120 7500, [www.barbican.org.uk](http://www.barbican.org.uk)

### ORNETTE COLEMAN

UK  
75th birthday concert with quartet and guests. London: Barbican, 2 May, 7:30pm, £15-£30, 0845 120 7500, [www.barbican.org.uk/](http://www.barbican.org.uk/)

### DISCO-BABEL

FRANCE  
One day event in the French capital featuring Charles Hayward, Ghedalia Lazartes, Burt, The Chap plus DJs, merchandise and more. Paris: Mains d'Ouvres, 2 April, 10-12 Euros, [www.discobabel.com](http://www.discobabel.com)

### DOMINO

BELGIUM  
Best looking line up yet for the wide-ranging Brussels festival that this year includes a 25th anniversary show by Enlitenzende Neubauten, plus Prefuse 73, Jamie Lidell, Boom Si, Subtle, Fog, Rhythm & Sound, 45 Session with Paul St Hilaire, Sunn O))), Hood, Joana Newsom, Sex Organs Of Admittance, Alasdair Roberts, Jaga Jaka and UCD Soundsystem as well as an alt-film programme and a exhibition of artwork drawn from the UK Touch label curated by the label's designer Jan Wolkhoff. Brussels: Antennes, Belgium, 6-14 April, [www.abocconcerts.be](http://www.abocconcerts.be)

**FESTIVAL INTERNATIONAL MUSIQUE ACTUELLE VICTORIAVILLE**  
CANADA  
Massive North American new music festival. Like Nor & Zeena Parkins, Anthony Braxton & Fred Frith, Wolf Eyes, Lars Helmer's "La Fanfare Pourpau", William Parker Little Huey Cordova, Peter Brötzmann Chicago Tentet, The Brecktons,

Christine Wozniak, The Nels Cline Singers, Kid Koala & Martin Tetreault, Nap Neck Blues Band, Oscillate Leopards, Plastic People Of The Universe with The Arca Orchestra, Philip Jack & Junk Schaller, Thurston Moore's Dream Aloof Unit, Anthony Braxton Sextet, Tenor's Tempest, Michel F. Cole project, and many others. Victoria: various venues, times, & prices, 19-23 May, 001 819 752 7912, [www.fimvc.ca](http://www.fimvc.ca)

### VINCENT GALLO ATP

UK  
The actor, musician, filmmaker and artist gets the opportunity to put together an edition of the All Tomorrow's Parties festival. Line-up so far includes Jim Spencer's Stress Explosion, Olivia Tremor Centre, Jarvis Chance & The Cantors (the original line up), Prefuse 73, Buck 65, Lydia Lunch, Jayne Cortez, The Magik Markers, Alt Rampe, Women And Children and The Tints. Ticket price includes three nights self-catering, charet accommodation, Camber Sands Holiday Centre, 22-24 April, £120, 020 7734 8932, [www.atpfestival.com](http://www.atpfestival.com)

### HERBIE HANCOCK

UK  
The pioneering keyboardist with his acoustic quartet featuring Gary Thomas, Scott Colley and Idris Muhammad (11 May); with special guests from past and future electric projects (28); and with The London Symphony Orchestra featuring music from the album *Gershwin's World* (29). London: Barbican, 7-30pm, £15-£30, 0845 120 7500, [www.barbican.org.uk](http://www.barbican.org.uk)

### ONLY CONNECT

UK  
Adventurous annual series of new works and collaborations includes Radiohead's Johnny Greenwood's new composition for The BBC Concert Orchestra (23 April); Death in Vegas premiere a new soundtrack to re-edits of three classic surf movies (30); a live group performs Miles Davis's score to the 1971 documentary about the boxer Jack Johnson (30 May); and Perfect Partner featuring Kim Gordon's collaboration with visual artist Tony Oursler,

London: Barbican, 7-30pm, £15-£30, 0845 120 7500, [www.barbican.org.uk](http://www.barbican.org.uk)

**SOUND PROJECTING**  
Fridays 5:30pm With Ed Penton  
**THE TRADITIONAL MUSIC HOUR**  
Thursdays 2pm With Reg Hall  
**VERMILION SOUNDS**  
Alternates Fridays 8:30pm. Environmental recordings

**YOU ARE HEAR**  
Mondays 8:30pm. Live sessions

**BBC RADIO 1 9-97-98 FM**  
**GILLES PETERSON WORLDWIDE**  
Sundays 11pm-1am  
Grooves from all over the shop

**BBC RADIO 3 90-93 FM**  
**LATE JAZZ**  
Monday-Thursdays 10:15-midnight. New Music  
**JAZZ ON 3**  
Friday 11:30pm-1am  
Midnight jazz in session and concert

**HEAR AND NOW**  
Sundays 11pm-1am. New Music: magazine  
**MIXING IT**  
Friday 10:15-11:30pm  
Hyper-electric mix of avant sounds

filmmaker Phil Morrison, Jim O'Rourke, Ikuo Mori, Tim Barnes & Of Olive described as a "surreal psychedelia-cum-road movie" (2 October), London: Barbican, 020 7638 8891, [www.barbican.org.uk](http://www.barbican.org.uk)

### SUBCURRENT

UK  
Acts confirmed for this new annual underground/outside music biennialist co-curated by the Wire's David Keenan include Tony Conrad, Wolf Eyes, Double Leopards, Fatsa, Cal De Sac, Oceano Pingu vs Snack Music 7, Es, Kernalist, Yskali, Kala, Family Underground, Hologatus, Virgin Eye Blood Brothers and Aulus. The festival is supported by The Wire. Glasgow: CCA, 21-23 April, 014 352 4900, [www.cca-glasgow.com](http://www.cca-glasgow.com), [www.subcurrentgpc.com](http://www.subcurrentgpc.com)

### JAMES TENNEY PORTRAIT

USA  
A programme of works in celebration of the US composer's 70th year. With performers including Eliot Sharp, Jenny Lin, Flax Quartet, Daniel Goode, Jim Pugh, Leslie Ross and Tenney himself. New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 11 May, 3pm, [www.whitney.org](http://www.whitney.org)

### ULRICH/SBERGER KALEIDOPHON

AUSTRIA  
Improvised annual featuring Henry Grimes Trio featuring Marilyn Crispell and Andrew Cyrille, Radican, Gary Huggins Quartet, Philip Wachsmann/Michael Bunco/Paul Lytton, Paul Rutherford's Rolla, Plastic Quantum, Günter Christmann's Mail d'Archive, Feldwerk, Daniel Stedler's Janus, Alex von Schlipf's Bach's, Kiefer's Kiefer & pro/ton and others. Uchingsberg Jazzfestival, 5-7 May, 00 43 7268 6301, [www.jazzfestival.at/](http://www.jazzfestival.at/)

**Out There Issue for the April issue should reach us by Friday 25 May**

# UK Radio

**RESONANCE 104.4 FM**  
Broadcasts across Central London broadcast, seven days a week with repeats broadcast outside these times. CD-quality Web streaming and full listings at [www.resonancefm.com](http://www.resonancefm.com)

**ADVENTURES IN MODERN MUSIC**  
Thursdays 9:30pm. Presented by The Wire staff

**BANALITY**  
Alternate Saturdays 8pm. With Richard Thomas

**BERMUDA TRIANGLE**  
Thursdays midnight. Presented by These Records

**CLEAR SPOT**  
Weekdays 7pm. Open access slot

**NOSTALGIE YA MBOKA**  
Saturdays 1:30pm

**CROSS RADIO**  
Sundays 11:30pm. John Dunsart's radio art show

**DIGGERS**  
Thursdays 8pm. With Savage Pencil and Sharon Gal

**FIFTY-FIFTY SOUND SYSTEM**  
Tuesdays 11:30pm. Old Skool dub & reggae

**KOSMISCHE**  
Tuesdays 10pm. Cosmic music

**MINING FOR GOLD**  
Fridays 2pm. With Johnny Brown

**ONKYODO**  
Alternate Tuesdays 8:30pm. Japanese music with The Wire's Bob Kaja, Alan Cummings and Clive Bell

**OST**  
Saturdays 4:30pm. Soundtracks with Johnny Track

**OUT TO LUNCH**  
Wednesdays 2pm. With Ben Watson

**OVER THE EDGE**  
Saturdays 8pm. With Negativland

**ROUGH TRADE SHOP**  
Thursdays 1pm. With Simon Russell

**SCRATCHING THE SURFACE**  
Alternate Tuesdays 8:30pm. With Mike Barnes

**SOLID STEEL**  
Mondays 1am. With Calicut

**SOUND POETS EXPOSED**  
Sundays 6:15pm. With Clive Graham

**BBC LANCASHIRE**  
95.5/103.9/104.5 FM, 835 MW  
**ON THE WIRE**  
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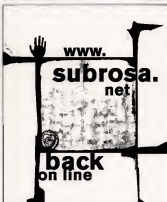
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# Epiphanies

How Pink Floyd and Art Ensemble Of Chicago put the zap on the head of itinerant teenager Michael Gira

Left: Sketch of Gira as a teenager  
Right: Pink Floyd's Roger Waters



In 1967 I was, if I may say so, a beautiful 13 year old California boy with long blond hair and I lived in an idyllic beachside suburb of Los Angeles. When not in school – which I ditched regularly anyway – I was at the beach, at the local park where the freaks gathered, or along the Strand in Venice, where one might occasionally watch the Hell's Angels randomly pummel an errant hippy. I avidly consumed the music of The Doors, The Seeds, Love, Country Joe And The Fish (I can still hear "Not So Sweet Martha Lorraine" – though I haven't listened to it since) and especially, The Mothers Of Invention. Zappa was my idol. His snide rejection of all things plastic (Hal Hal), the freaked out weirdness of the music, and his gnarled appearance formed an attractive opposite to my sunny surroundings. Unfortunately, I was also an enthusiastic consumer of another lure of hippy culture – drugs: Second, Nembutal, Benzadrine, Methedrine, and naturally, LSD. I studiously counted each dose of the latter and by 13 had tripped 200 times. I had a taste for anything cerebral and mind churning – a rag dipped into the gas tank of a car served just as well as the inhaled fumes of Energizer Spot Remover – with acid, this made for the ultimate in stupefaction. I had zero parental supervision. My mother, in whose care I resided, was a deeply committed alcoholic. She spent day and night sitting at her desk drinking in solitude – hallucinating and bitterly cursing with alarming eloquence the day my father (who'd absconded) was born. Drugs were bought with money stolen from her ungarded purse and by selling her jewels, cameras, and our family collection of rare silver dollars. This couldn't go on forever. After several arrests for vandalism and general juvenile delinquency, I was expelled from my Junior High School for smashing the plate glass window of the Vice Principal's office and was soon arrested again, this time stumbling and nearly comatose in a vacant lot with a baggy full of Roids (Secoral capsules) dangling from my hand. That was it. The authorities set their ultimatum: either my father would come and get me or I would be taken from my mother and placed in a Juvenile Facility indefinitely.

He soon arrived, twisted my ear with military precision, and took me first to Indiana for a year (don't ask), and then to Paris, France, where he'd landed a job as a business consultant. It was 1969 now, and Paris was in the hedonistic afterglow of the student revolts. I did the right thing and promptly ran away. I survived for a time panhandling on the Pont Neuf, and was then taken under the wing of a group of feral Italian hippies. The leader had a mucus-encrusted beard, yellow curling fingernails, wore a mangy alghan coat, and carried a white rat on his shoulder. We all had lice. We ate leftover food from cafes, begged, drew inept chalk drawings on the sidewalk for tourists, and slept in abandoned buildings. After a few weeks word came of a huge music festival happening in Belgium. We split Paris and hitchhiked up to our psychedelic Mecca. We landed in cold mud, cow dung and straw, with thousands of other steaming and moulty hippies. I was continuously and ravenously hungry. But somehow drugs never seemed to be a problem. They were everywhere. I have no idea what impression the music would have made without them.

The line-up included the following: Pink Floyd, Art Ensemble Of Chicago, Anthony Braxton, Captain Beefheart, The Nice, Pretty Things, Archie Shepp, Soft Machine and my idol, Frank Zappa. This might sound like a Wive reader's wet dream, but I confess I remember only a few key moments. The first is a SCREAM, courtesy of Pink Floyd. Sprawled in the dirt, I heard an amorphous, gathering tide of orchestral, but soothing sound. Then, suddenly everything erupted – cued by the scream – as if you'd been mindlessly drifting in warm water, hallucinating, and a lunatic beast is now attacking you with a butcher knife, flinging shards of your body up to heaven. Wonderful it's "Careful With That Axe, Eugene", of course, though I didn't know it at the time. I doubt I'd ever even heard of Pink Floyd. All I know is it sent shockwaves of really, really bad vibes through my spine and the sensation was quite pleasurable indeed. It sprayed fountains of cleansing sulphuric acid on the filthy crowd. They

needed it. I've never forgotten that moment (second?). It was the first instance I realized music could be more than a recreation and could actually alter you in a direct, experiential way. The only other time I've experienced a musical/sonic sensation that complete is with the music of Glenn Branca, much, much later. And, oh yes, Frank Zappa sat in with Pink Floyd on another song, and it truly, truly sucked. I lost interest in him forever right there. At that age, I had no reference or critical sensibility, but I *hated* guitar solos. This one intruded on the music in a stupid, ego-driven way, and he deflated before my eyes. Hilariously, the local troll-actwits were waving banners while he played, calling him a capitalist for demanding money to perform – what did they expect?

But the most indelible moment was the rousing reception The Ensemble Of Chicago received. Imagine a steady rumble of what's now called skronk I guess – not loud, but persistent and undeniably intense, a riotous of conflicting noises to most ears. I was gone, spinning on acid and had just smoked a massive am-sized spliff, feeling the first deep tug of nausea as a result. But I was in it, right there with them, my fellow countrymen, just a blond haired kid from California down in the mud in a sea of ugly and increasingly scary troglodytes. Then, THE SOUND: a BIG low murrar, an endless exhalation of strinking gas. THE ENTIRE CROWD WAS BOOING – a sustained, deep drone of simian intolerance. They all chimed in, thousands of them – cows rising from a narcotic slumber, feeding each other's ugliness. It was and remains the most hideous and simultaneously mesmerizing sound I've ever heard. I felt it reverberating in my belly (and reverberate it did: I threw up a psychedelic breakfast right there into my lap). I have measured everything I've done professionally against that amazing, unstoppable sound ever since. Hal Hal! It was a warning, but I have to say, it also had a very seductive quality to it. □ Michael Gira founded Swans in 1980. His new *Angels Of Light* album The Angels Of Light Sing "Other People" is out this month on Young God. [www.younggodrecords.com](http://www.younggodrecords.com)

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